

CULTURE AND DECOLONIZATION IN THE BRITISH WEST INDIES
LITERATURE AND POLITICS, 1930-1980

By

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PREFACE

In 1949 Vic Reid's novel *New Day* became the first to be labeled West Indian Literature. Many more books and authors would follow. The novels were about the islands of the British Caribbean: Trinidad and Tobago; Jamaica; the Leeward Islands of Dominica, Montserrat, St. Kitts/Nevis, Antigua and Barbuda, and Anguilla; and the Windward Islands of Barbados, Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and St. Lucia. Although each country maintains a unique identity, their populations also define themselves regionally as West Indians and today acknowledge some similarities, especially in history and culture. This study is about the novelists and the impact they had on the West Indies between 1950, the date associated with the advent of West Indian literature, and 1980, the date by which literary works began to focus on the problems of specific islands and moved away from a West Indian perspective. This work contributes to the fields of British colonial history and West Indian history in that it seeks to present the novels in relation to social and political developments in the British West Indies in the last years of colonial rule and the first years of independence. By looking at the events that shaped the British West Indies and individual islands, it will be possible to view the novels as post-colonialists do to provide a more complete picture of the region in the twentieth century.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“Art is the mirror through which a society perceives itself,”¹ according to Michael Manley, long time prime minister of Jamaica. This study is about the society of the British Caribbean and one of the chief art forms – novels – produced by that society. It considers the way West Indian novelists portrayed their society. The study focuses on the period between 1930, the date associated with the advent of West Indian literature, and 1980, the date by which literary works began to focus on the problems of specific islands and to move away from a West Indian perspective. The British Caribbean they write about in this time frame includes the islands of Trinidad and Tobago; Jamaica; and Barbados.² Although each country maintains a unique identity, their populations also define themselves regionally as West Indians and today acknowledge some similarities, especially in history and culture.

The thesis of this work is threefold. First, West Indians began to define themselves as such to distance them from their British colonial rulers and establish an identity of their own. Second, although their novels were written mainly for a European or American audience, they did reach an audience on the islands and had an impact there

¹Michael Manley, *The Politics of Change: A Jamaican's Testament* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1975), 173.

²The British West Indies also includes the Leeward Islands of Dominica, Monsterrat, St. Kitts/Nevis, Antigua and Barbuda, and Anguilla; and the Windward Islands of Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and St. Lucia. Because West Indian novelists wrote about the three largest islands, the smaller ones will not be included in this study. See Appendix A for a breakdown of the area and population of the islands.

in defining the culture of the region. Third, even though these authors did not intend their novels to be used to provide a history of the West Indies, they presented a realistic view of the black and East Indian segments of West Indian society between 1950 and 1980, so they can be used them to supplement historical works in order to provide a more comprehensive view of the islands.

What led these novelists to define themselves as West Indians was their experience in England after 1945. Residents of the British Caribbean colonies always considered themselves British. When they arrived in England in great numbers to find work or pursue careers after World War II, they discovered that the British viewed them as foreigners. At the same time they found that no matter what island they came from they shared certain things in common. They used the English language brought to them by the British, although the accents varied. They had a common history, also brought to them by the British, although some of the details of life on individual islands varied. The inhabitants of the islands shared common life-styles with similar racial and class differences. Their experiences caused them to ask what exactly made them West Indian. The answer was particularly important to the inhabitants of these islands where there was no indigenous population to provide a culture. The novelists who explored these issues were the descendants of slaves, like George Lamming, or indentured servants brought to the islands as laborers, like Sam Selvon. Their search for an identity constitutes a main focus of their work.

Although these authors wrote for British or American audiences, this study will argue that they had an impact at home. Evidence will show that the novels were not read by most of the population. In fact, in the 1950s there were only a few small local

publishers in the West Indies and no significant reading public. A majority of the population was illiterate or semi-literate. There is clear evidence, though, that the political elites were familiar with the ideas and themes presented in the novels. Norman Manley, the founder of the People's National Party, one of the first political organizations in Jamaica, reflected on the importance of authors like Roger Mais, a personal friend of Manley's, to the nationalist movement of the 1950s. In 1962 V.S. Naipaul wrote *The Middle Passage* after Eric Williams, the prime minister of Trinidad, invited him to tour the region and write about his impressions.³ In the 1970s Austin Clarke returned to Barbados to spend a year working for the government. So, West Indian novels and novelists were known to the political leaders of the region.

This study will also argue that because the novelists relied on the technique of social realism in their work, their novels can supplement the history of the period. Realist novels portray everyday life as observed by the novelist.⁴ Political leaders and literary artists followed a parallel course for most of the twentieth century. The two groups differed mainly in their choice of how to begin to define themselves as distinct from the British; the new island leaders chose to act through their efforts to gain political independence; the novelists chose to explore their West Indian heritage through works of fiction. Studying political developments alongside literary compositions will provide a comprehensive view of West Indian society in the immediate pre- and post-independence periods.

³Trinidad and Tobago were united as one colony by the British in 1889, but for purposes of this work we will refer to the country as Trinidad.

⁴For a discussion of the realist novel see Jerome Blum, "Fiction and the European Peasantry: The Realist Novel as a Historical Source," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 1 (April 8, 1982): 122-139.

This study emphasizes the socioeconomic problems the people of the West Indies faced during the last years of British colonial rule and the early years of independence. Although popular culture, particularly the use of music as a form of protest and the importance of some religious groups to the islands, will appear in some of the novels, it is not the goal of this study to assess the impact of music or religion in this time period. This study also omits the white minority population and its relationship to the emergent regional identity. The focus of this study is the black majority population and the significant East Indian minority on the island of Trinidad.⁵

The novelists that are important to this study are those who became known for producing West Indian literature. West Indian literature is defined by literary critics as the literature of the former and current island dependencies of Britain in the Caribbean. As a defined body of work, this literature dates from 1950. Prior to the 1950s, literary critics generally spoke in terms of a small number of works of local literature emanating from Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, or any one island. The British encouraged this cultural isolation of the individual islands by treating each colony independently and discouraging close ties among the colonies. In the 1930s some West Indians began to explore their own culture, but with no critique of the British. In fact, their goal was to educate their fellow middle-class islanders who were not aware of the plight of the majority lower-class populations who inhabited their own islands. C.L.R. James of Trinidad, for example, wrote about the urban poor.

West Indian literature went through three phases, each of which overlaps with another so that there is no sharp division among them; many authors wrote in more than

⁵See Appendix B for a racial breakdown of the population on the islands of the British West Indies.

one phase.⁶ Early works, from 1949 to the mid-1950s, were often anti-British, reflecting anti-colonial feelings and despair at the slow process of independence. It was the generation who migrated after World War II in large numbers that launched a serious investigation into life in the West Indies. Writers of this period were critical of the British who had ruled them for so many years and encouraged them to believe that they too were British. They came from different islands but confronted the same problems. Most importantly, they believed they had to establish a new identity in order to move forward from colonial domination to independence. Vic Reid of Jamaica wrote the first of the novels described as West Indian literature. George Lamming of Barbados and V.S. Naipaul of Trinidad were the most famous of the group. Although their novels differ in style and attitude, they generally take an anti-colonial stance, focusing particularly on the racial and class divisions the British left in their wake. They all seek to identify a history of the majority of islanders distinct from that of Britain and to encourage West Indians to view themselves from the perspective of their own accomplishments.

In the late 1950s and the early 1960s, with anti-colonial attitudes still apparent, the focus shifted to the political development of the islands. In this phase novels reflected a growing sense of nationalism, the hopes for a regional federation, and interest in local culture. At the same time many authors began to take a closer look at the type of local leader who was emerging. The same men who wrote the early novels wrote in this period.

⁶Most analysts agree that the formal phase of West Indian literature began in 1950; see King, "Introduction," 3-4. Frank Birbalsingh breaks the phases of West Indian literature into slightly different periods, beginning with the novels produced in the 1930s. See Frank Birbalsingh, "Introduction," in Frank Birbalsingh, ed., *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), xi.

By the late 1960s and the 1970s a new generation of novelists, like Austin Clarke and Orlando Patterson, emerged to join those already established. Many of this group also wrote as émigrés, but most often from places like Canada and the United States. Although some of them continued to focus on the same problems as the first generation of writers, such as racial and class divisions, they also began to place more emphasis on the problems of the first generation of native leaders, who first came to power in 1962. The novelists believed these men had failed to produce a significant change in the lives of most islanders. Another new topic was the problems faced by returning émigrés who found it difficult to go back home to work for the new governments. They often discovered that they no longer fit into native societies that had changed significantly in the years following independence. For example, Austin Clarke of Barbados wrote from Canada about the problems of a returning émigré, a book that he based on his own experiences; Orlando Patterson of Jamaica taught sociology in the United States and wrote novels about the issues he studied as an academic.⁷

By the 1980s the problems of individual islands, many of which developed differently after independence, would take center stage. West Indians would become less apparent as the larger perspective became “Caribbean” in focus. Caribbean implied a relationship among islands regardless of their imperial and linguistic experience. Because the focus of this study is the West Indian perspective, it ends before this shift in emphasis takes place.

⁷For example, see Austin Clarke, *The Prime Minister* (Ontario: General Publishing, 1977) and Orlando Patterson, *An Absence of Ruins* (London: Hutchinson, 1967).

Methodology

This study relies on novels to provide information about West Indian society and peasant mentalities between 1930 and 1980. Literary critics argue that literature is politically neutral; they believe that it should be studied in isolation, without reference to any social or political context. They are more interested in style and form than in what a novel might say about any one period of time.⁸ Historians rely on empirical data to inform their judgment. This often results in a study that focuses on the elites in society and ignores the masses. Historians study events and rely on multiple sources to verify events. By relying on novels that present an interpretation of society in the period under study, historians can include the views of ordinary citizens to a specific period in time. According to James Smith Allen, “the critic’s concerns are essentially . . . analytical and present-minded; the historian’s . . . comparative and focused on the past.”⁹

Realist novels, upon which this study relies, emerged in the mid-nineteenth century. According to Jerome Blum, realist novelists

Wanted to show life as it really was to portray truthfully the actions and ambitions, the striving and the disappointments, the kindnesses and the brutalities, the triumphs and tragedies of everyday life. To achieve these ends they wrote about what they themselves had observed at first hand. That meant that their fiction dealt always with their own time. . . . to reinforce their representation of reality they chose to write about ordinary men and women and especially about the lower orders.¹⁰

Most West Indian novels were written by men who lived through the events they described.

⁸James Smith Allen, “History and the Novel: Mentalite in Modern Popular Fiction,” *History and Theory* 22 (October 1983): 240-241.

⁹Allen, “History and the Novel,” 241.

¹⁰Blum, “Fiction and the European Peasantry,” 124-125.

Most investigations of West Indian literature to date have been undertaken within the framework of “post-colonial studies.” According to post-colonial theorists Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, when imperial culture interacts with indigenous culture one result is post-colonial literature. They believe that the term “post-colonial” describes more than a time frame that exists once colonialism has ended. It actually begins when a colonial people begin to write about their status under foreign domination. They argued that “post-colonial studies are based in the ‘historical fact’ of European colonialism.”¹¹ Even the early novels of Ralph Mendes and C.L.R. James, which in the West Indies of the 1930s viewed colonial society from a new perspective without challenging the role of the ruling authority, become post-colonial because they focused on local culture.

Post-colonial studies began as literary studies because English was the language of cultural propaganda and often the language of dissent. Early studies of the literature focused on style; the relationship between the novels and life on the islands merited some attention but no serious study. In recent years historians have begun to study the ties between literature and post-colonial realities and to explore the developments between the literature and social and political relationships in post-colonial societies.¹² Robert Young, British post-colonial theorist and historian, said,

At a certain level, most forms of colonialism are, after all, in the final analysis, colonialism, the rule by force of a people by an external power . . . Those who today emphasize its geographical and historical differences may in effect be only repeating uncritically colonialism’s own partitioning strategies. Yet at this point in the postcolonial

¹¹Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 2; Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), 195.

¹²Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, 210-211.

era [1995], as we seek to understand the operation and effects of colonial history, the homogenization of colonialism does also need to be set against its historical and geographical particularities.¹³

Writing specifically of the West Indies, George Lamming added,

One of the functions of the novel in the Caribbean is to serve as a form of social history. The novelist thus becomes one of the more serious social historians by bringing to attention the interior lives of men and women who were never thought to be sufficiently important for their thoughts and feelings to be registered [by the British].¹⁴

Historians have been slow to incorporate colonial or post-colonial literature and the insights it can supply into mainstream scholarship. According to Blum, “The notion of using novels as sources runs up hard against a highly regarded canon of historical scholarship. This maintains that conclusions about what happened in the past can be established only by referral to events that have actually occurred and for which, preferably, there are at least two independent witnesses. Obviously fiction cannot meet this standard.”¹⁵ A different perspective was argued by Amilcar Cabral, though; he asserted that history exposes contradictions and conflicts in a society and culture provides insights into how to resolve those conflicts.¹⁶ “Whatever may be the ideology or idealist characteristics of cultural expression, culture is an essential element of the history of a

¹³Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), 165.

¹⁴George Lamming, “Concepts of the Caribbean,” in Bribalsingh, ed., *Frontiers*, 5.

¹⁵Blum, “Fiction and the European Peasantry,” 125.

¹⁶Amilcar Cabral was a writer and politician who led the African national movements in Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde Islands. He also led Guinea-Bissau’s independence movement. See Patrick Chabal, *Amilcar Cabral: Revolutionary Leadership and People’s War* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003) and Ronald A. Chilcote, *Amilcar Cabral’s Revolutionary Theory and Practice: A Critical Guide* (Boulder, CO: L. Rienner, 1991).

people. Culture is, perhaps, the product of this history.”¹⁷ Literature provides a look at local conditions and experiences that a political or social approach might ignore. In his exploration of African literature in the twentieth century, Shatto Gakwandi points out the importance of post-colonial literature. In social realist novels,

the individual is treated as a social unit, most often he is silhouetted against the institutions, traditions and general behaviour of his society so as to underscore his insignificance. His aspirations, achievements and disappointments are seen as conditioned by his place in a given society and can be used to raise wider ethical, moral and social issues.¹⁸

The novel provides a way to present the lives of the peasant and urban slum dweller and show how the conditions of society affect them. Literature allows the historian access to local experience, feelings, emotions, and the rituals of everyday life. Lynn Hunt argues that “literary works do not just reflect social and political reality; they were instruments for transforming reality.”¹⁹

While they searched for their roots in the West Indies, novelists also helped create the defining features of West Indian society and culture. Benedict Anderson emphasized the importance of literature in defining what he called an “imagined community.” Anderson argued that nationalism emerged when language got into print and was transmitted through books, allowing subjects to identify themselves as members of the community of readers. Language and literature allowed post-colonial societies to invent a self image through which they could act to liberate themselves from imperialism. In the twentieth century the imperial power needed bureaucrats to help them run local

¹⁷Amilcar Cabral, *Return to the Sources: Selected Speeches* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), 42.

¹⁸Shatto Arthur Gakwandi, *The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa* (London: Heinemann, 1977), 127.

¹⁹Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 17.

governments, so they began to open education more to local inhabitants. By doing so they produced a native intellectual community that had no real power.²⁰ The native intellectual community in the West Indies included writers and politicians who worked to forge a new nationalism. There were three particular problems they had to confront: anti-colonialism, class, and race.

Anti-colonialism can be found in every phase of West Indian writing. In the view of these authors the West Indies experience represented the worst features of colonialism. The native population was annihilated almost completely by colonial invaders. The slave trade and plantation slavery isolated African blacks from any leadership role on the islands. The indenture system that replaced slavery stranded East Indians when the white plantation owners who brought them there failed to honor the return clauses of their contracts. According to Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, African writer and post-colonial theorist,

The colonial plantation system tried to impose on the Afro-Caribbean man and woman, a double alienation: from Africa and from the Caribbean movement. The aim was still the same: make him look down upon his achievements, his capabilities, his vision of self, and look up to Europe as the Alpha and Omega of human civilization.²¹

Thiong'o went on to say that the response was resistance. West Indian writers used anti-colonialism to begin to redefine themselves. Even when West Indian writers focused on contemporary reality they could not ignore the influence of colonialism on current history.

Class differences, which always existed in West Indian society, have also formed a key theme for West Indian novelists. During the long colonial period, the British

²⁰Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, [1983] 1991), 15, 49, 140.

²¹Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, "Decolonization: A Prefatory Note," in Amon Saba Saakana, *The Colonial Legacy in Caribbean Literature* (London: Karnak House, 1987), 10.

formed the upper class, educated and professional mixed race and black inhabitants of the islands made up the middle class, and the majority uneducated black population on each island made up a lower class of urban laborers and slum dwellers, and rural peasants. In the early twentieth century when the black middle class began to lobby the British for increased rights and eventually independence they enlisted, and often received, the help of lower-class workers, particularly from urban areas. By the mid-1950s, the middle-class leaders had become aware of the fact that their values were not necessarily those of the general populace. The middle class and the working class maintained an alliance, though, until 1962. That year brought the collapse of the West Indies Federation, the first attempt on the part of the British and local governments to gain independence for their islands as a group. This failure divided the classes when on each of the islands leaders searched for others, or each other, to blame. From this point, class became a theme that West Indian writers explored as they detailed the differences between the black middle and working class and both of these and the peasants.

Race is also a key theme in West Indies literature and a complicated issue in the West Indies. Views on race changed as the islands went from colonies, through the Federation period, and on to independence. Blacks dominate the population, but the black population itself is stratified by color; under the British colonial system the lighter one's skin tone, the greater the opportunity for advancement. That bias did not disappear completely after independence. Frantz Fanon, the French-Caribbean author and post-colonial theorist, has said,

National consciousness, instead of being the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people, instead of being the immediate and most obvious result of the mobilization of the fragile travesty of what it might

have been [because] the nation is passed over for the race . .
. [This is] the historical result of the incapacity of the
national middle class to rationalize popular action.²²

In the West Indies two specific racial issues spoke to the inability of nations to satisfy the demands of their people in the late twentieth century. Trinidad, with its tensions between blacks and East Indians, experienced the most intense racial conflict during this period. Blacks and East Indians had hated each other ever since plantation owners brought East Indians in to replace the former slaves who refused to work on the plantations. The result was a black peasant class that struggles to survive while East Indians received wages for their labor. From the white perspective, East Indians ranked just above blacks. The enmity generated survived long after the indenture system ended. The introduction of Black Power politics, an assertion of black rights imported from the United States, though, was also a prominent part of the history of some islands, particularly Jamaica and Trinidad. Although native black politicians dominated the governments in all the islands after independence, middle- and lower-class blacks did not always benefit from political reforms. The Black Power movement focused attention on the fact that most Caribbean businesses were owned by whites, so economic power often rested in white hands. In 1970 a Black Power riot in which lower-class blacks demanded more reforms from black political leaders and more economic control of the island by local blacks disrupted life in Trinidad.

Although the importance of these issues varied from time to time, they did appear consistently in the novels of West Indian authors. They were not trying to write a new history of their people; they were trying to find a place for the West Indian in what had

²²Frantz Fanon, "National Culture," in Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, ed., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 156.

been a British view of the islands. As Vic Reid said in the introduction of his groundbreaking novel *New Day*, “What I have attempted is to transfer to paper some of the beauty, kindliness, and humour of my people, weaving characters into the wider framework . . . and creating a tale that will offer as true an impression as fiction can of the way by which Jamaica and its people came to today.”²³

This study attempts to provide a true impression of the West Indies in the immediate pre- and post-independence years by linking the works of novelists to historical developments, especially in politics. In the West Indies the local political relationship to literary output in the post-colonial era has not been explored.²⁴ This study seeks to do that. The task of this historian is to relate the literary output of West Indian literature to the specific social and political realities of the islands. Comparisons can allow us to reach conclusions about the novels’ influence. Factual information allows us to test the evidence presented in the novels. Viewing the literature in conjunction with the realities of political and social change in the West Indies will allow us to see that both historical and literary research contribute to an understanding of life in the West Indies between 1930 and 1980.

British Literature from the West Indies

Both fiction and non-fiction writers have written about the islands since their discovery, but any reference to the majority black population treated them as people to be acted upon rather than people who should be included in decision-making positions. No writer explored the island from the perspective of the majority black population of the

²³Vic Reid, *New Day* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham Bookseller, [1949] 1972), v.

²⁴Some examples of this type of study undertaken for other post-colonial regimes include Gakwandi, *The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa*, and Meenakshi Mukharjee, *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

region. This study will do that. A review of the literary output of the region will demonstrate three important trends. First, prior to the twentieth century the men who wrote about the West Indies were British expatriates or white colonials. The issues that concerned them reflected the concerns of those in power, including the structure of local government, the degree of British involvement in local matters, the status and problems of slavery. Second, prior to the twentieth century there was no comprehensive history of the islands produced from a colonial point of view. What little history had been written came from the British. Third, when historians began to write from a local perspective they did not incorporate literary sources into their studies. It was not until after 1980 that some historical studies made reference to cultural developments; politics and economic remained the primary topics they considered.

Early English histories recorded the British process of establishing control of the region. In the seventeenth century, most books about the West Indies were written by Englishmen in reaction to, or in an effort to control, political developments in the region. These works generally came out of the Whig School of British West Indian historiography, whose authors were resolutely colonial in their political sympathies. Dalby Thomas, a British merchant and writer, authored *An Historical Account of the Rise and Growth of the West Indian Colonies* in 1690; he wanted to show the importance of the British West Indian colonies to the fiscal policy of the home government. Under the mercantile system colonies were valuable because they provided wealth to the mother country. In the West Indies sugar generated income for the British, who served as the middleman in European trade. Thomas believed the islands were important enough to warrant political input into home government decisions. He advocated that

representatives of the British settlements in the Caribbean should be consulted on government policies that affected them.²⁵

In the eighteenth century many books dealt with race and slavery, key themes in West Indian history and literature then and now. During this period local Englishmen continued to lobby Britain for input into how the islands were governed. By focusing attention on the indolence of the black population, and asserting the need for slavery to control the blacks, they tried to send the message to Britain that they, the local inhabitants, knew what was best for the islands. Bryan Edwards served as a member of the colonial assembly of Jamaica and a Member of Parliament. He was also a West Indian merchant and historian, who included a complete history of the origin, political system, inhabitants, customs, institutions, agriculture, and commerce of the region in his *History of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, published in 1793. Edwards believed that Parliament should not have absolute control over the colonies. He asserted that local assemblies would best represent colonial citizens and pointed out that West Indians were Englishmen, not colonial subjects. Edwards differed from most authors of his period in that he was opposed to slavery, but he did not see how the system could be changed without the disruption of society. He did agree with his fellow West Indian Creoles when he asserted that many blacks were better off in the West Indies, implying that African life was intolerable.²⁶

²⁵Elsa Goveia, *A Study on the Historiography of the British West Indies to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1956), 30.

²⁶In the early years of British colonization Creole referred to the culture that emerged from the blending of different cultures found in the region. In later years, it was also used to identify individuals born in the Caribbean of mixed European and African descent, however, black islanders use the term “black” to describe inhabitants with a dark skin tone and “colored” or “mixed-race” to describe blacks with a lighter skin tone. See Antonio Benitez-Roje, “Three Words toward Creolization,” in Kathleen M. Balutansky and Marie-Agnes Sourieau, *Caribbean Creolization: Reflections on the Cultural Dynamics of Language, Literature, and Identity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 54; Frank Martinus

In the nineteenth century, locals continued to lobby Britain for control. Edward Long, British lawyer and plantation owner whose family had been associated with Jamaica since the early days of English occupation, wrote a history sympathetic to Jamaica's white Creoles. He described the existing government as a miniature of Britain, with the governor substituting for the king. Long condemned official British corruption and inefficiency, adopting the view that local leaders were in a better position to govern the island. He also condemned the practice of sending children of the white elite to England for their education. He pointed out that most had no desire to return so the practice robbed the island of potentially good leadership.²⁷ According to Elsa Goveia, for Long, "Jamaica and England were two separate communities, in which assimilation, up to a point, was valuable, but in which identification could not fail to be harmful, even if it could be achieved. England was too far off and too different to succeed in any attempt to govern Jamaica directly."²⁸ Long accepted the general West Indian attitude of the day that described blacks as inferior. His views so closely supported the ideas of West Indian planters that promoters of the planters frequently quoted him in British parliamentary debates as late as 1834.²⁹

In 1833 Parliament passed the Emancipation Act, which freed all slaves in the British colonies as of August 1, 1834. British authors continued to focus on how the islands should be governed, expanding the debate to include the question of who should

Orion, "The Victory of the Concubines and the Nannies," in Balutansky and Sourieau, *Caribbean Creolization*, 110; Goveia, *Historiography*, 81-88.

²⁷Goveia, *Historiography*, 56; Morley Ayearst, *The British West Indies: The Search for Self-Government* (New York: New York University Press, 1960), 20-22; Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and Its Background* (London: Heinemann, 1983), 34; Louis James, ed., *Caribbean Literature in English* (London: Longman, 1999), 10.

²⁸Goveia, *Historiography*, 56.

²⁹Goveia, *Historiography*, 53-60; Gordon K. Lewis, *Slavery, Imperialism, and Freedom: Studies in English Radical Thought* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), 43.

control the now free slaves. In 1873, writer and historian W. J. Gardner's *History of Jamaica*, a chronological narrative with separate studies of commerce, agriculture, religion, education, and customs, marked a break with the old Whig tradition in West Indian history. Gardner studied the slave and planter as individuals rather than groups, and rejected the old representative system of government in which local white elites dominated. He favored a Crown Colony system of government for Jamaica. This type of system, instituted a few years later, allowed the British to control local affairs through a Crown-appointed royal governor who relied on input from local officials, some appointed and some, a minority, elected from the local white population. The British allowed the colonies to keep their elected assemblies, but the governor, representing Britain, had the final say in all matters.³⁰

The nineteenth century also produced special studies, most of which focused on the issue of slavery and its repercussions. Historian William G. Sewell's *The Ordeal of Free Labour in the West Indies* (1862) sought to assess the material and commercial effects produced by Emancipation in the British islands. He argued that the sugar industry had been in decline before Emancipation, that many plantations were heavily mortgaged, and that the lack of land prevented planters from diversifying. Emancipation had aggravated these problems. Using Barbados as an example, though, Sewell concluded that some former slaves were improving their lives by working as artisans and mechanics. In Jamaica, Sewell defended slaves who were trying to improve their positions; he said it was wrong to describe them as revolutionary or hostile to society.³¹

³⁰Goveia, *Historiography*, 121-124.

³¹Goveia, *Historiography*, 147-150; Saakana, *Colonial Legacy*, 21; Eric Williams, *British Historians and the West Indies* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1966), 97-102.

James Anthony Froude, a British historian, wrote a controversial assessment of slavery called *The English in the West Indies or the Bow of Ulysses*, which was published in 1888. Arguing a strong pro-slavery doctrine, he held that slavery in the West Indies had been beneficial and that Emancipation had ruined the islands. He described West Indian blacks as children who needed the guidance of Britain, without which they would be barbarians. According to Goveia, Froude “enraged his critics by his determined hostility to the idea of self-government, and outraged them by his racialism.”³² One year after Froude’s work appeared, J. J. Thomas, a black Trinidadian, responded with *Froudacity*. Thomas was a largely self-educated black schoolmaster. His rebuttal defended his race, but without apology or a sense of inferiority. It was a rare example of a black contribution to any debate in the West Indies. Thomas agreed that Trinidad should be allowed a greater degree of national sovereignty but under a system that included all races in positions of leadership. Thomas rejected the idea that antagonism between the races was necessary. He argued that it was a mistake to ignore black opinion, implying that one day blacks would rise up in protest.³³ With the exception of Thomas’s reply to Froude, these books are representative of the type of literature being produced on or about the islands. Any reference to the majority black population, even a rare sympathetic one, treats them as people to be acted upon rather than people who should be included in decision-making positions. The history and literature are British, not West Indian.

³²Goveia, *Historiography*, 147-154; Anthony Boxill, “The Beginnings to 1929,” in King, ed., *West Indian Literature*, 31; Williams, *British Historians*, 175-184; James, *Caribbean Literature*, 17.

³³Boxill, “The Beginnings,” in King, ed., *West Indian Literature*, 31; Roberto Marquez, “Emergence of a Caribbean Literature,” in Franklin W. Knight and Colin A. Palmer, eds., *The Modern Caribbean* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 306-309; Cynthia Jones, *The Maroon Narrative: Caribbean Literature in English Across Boundaries, Ethnicities, and Centuries* (London: Heinemann, 2002), 40; James, *Caribbean Literature*, 17.

When the West Indian literature movement arrived on the scene in 1950 only one history of one island written from a Caribbean perspective existed. In the early years of the twentieth century, Gertrude Carmichael wrote the first comprehensive history of Trinidad and Tobago, *History of the West Indian Islands of Trinidad and Tobago, 1498-1900*.³⁴ She began with the Spanish occupation of Trinidad, detailing Spanish rule until the British took control in 1802. Carmichael also reported on the Spanish and French occupation of Tobago before the British arrived in 1814. She then detailed the political and economic development of both islands until the British united them under one government in 1889. Her study ended in 1900, so it pre-dated the development of a literary movement in Trinidad. In 1958 Peter Abrahams wrote a British history of Jamaica; his book was sponsored by the British Colonial Office. In a Foreword to the book, former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill said that the book was designed to shed light on British colonial policies, which he believed were misunderstood by many. What Abrahams wrote was part history, part travelogue, and partially a record of his personal experiences and meetings with local leaders, British and Jamaican, during his stay in Jamaica. Abrahams mentioned the importance of the literature being written by authors from Jamaica and named writers like Claude McKay, Vic Reid, and Roger Mais but without any details of the novels they wrote or how their contributions paralleled political developments.³⁵ So up to 1960 there was no serious study of modern history being done in the West Indies and no review of the literature being produced there.

³⁴Gertrude Carmichael, *History of the Islands of Trinidad and Tobago, 1498-1900* (London: A. Redman, 1961); Black, *Trinidad*, 167.

³⁵Peter Abrahams, *Jamaica: An Island Mosaic* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1957).

Most histories written in the 1960s reflected a need to document political developments leading up to Federation and independence. Eric Williams wrote *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago*, which was not published until 1962, to coincide with Trinidad and Tobago's independence.³⁶ It is an anti-colonial work in which he blamed the British for distorting African culture and encouraging racial dissension. Although it mirrored some of the claims of novelists writing at the same time, Williams did not use their work to support his views. He argued that the British always made decisions that benefited the economic development of white society and kept blacks mired in poverty; when they spoke of humanitarian concerns, they were doing so to mask the real reasons they supported emancipation.³⁷ Samuel and Edith Hurwitz wrote *Jamaica: A Historical Portrait* in 1971.³⁸ They traced the history of Jamaica from its discovery through the first decade of independence, ending in 1971. They included a section in the final chapter that they labeled "Cultural Nationalism." It focused on the efforts of the government to create a national outlook for the newly independent island. For instance, they included information about archeological digs undertaken 1962, efforts to end discrimination against the lower class, and the creation of a Folklore Research Program established by the Institute of Jamaica, a government sponsored agency. They did not mention any of the literary efforts of Jamaicans up to 1971.

In 1969, well after the advent of West Indian literature, Williams contributed the first comprehensive history of the Caribbean as a whole, *From Columbus to Castro: The*

³⁶Gertrude Carmichael, *History of the Islands of Trinidad and Tobago, 1498-1900* (London: A. Redman, 1961); Black, *Trinidad*, 167.

³⁷Eric Williams, *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago* (New York: Praeger, [1962] 1964).

³⁸Samuel J. Hurwitz and Edith F. Hurwitz, *Jamaica: A Historical Portrait* (New York: Praeger, 1971).

History of the Caribbean, 1492-1969.³⁹ His work represents an early example of the change in direction of histories of the region. The concept of Caribbean, as opposed to West Indian, reflects the idea that all the islands of the Caribbean had things in common, especially slavery and imperial control, and should work together for their own benefit no matter who their colonial ruler was. This shift away from a focus on West Indian would happen to novelists as well. In the book Williams decried the fact that most West Indians had ignored their own history, even as they developed their own new culture. Williams's goal was to present a work that focused on the cultural integration of the region in order to inspire closer collaboration among the countries of the Caribbean, whether they were or had been British, French, Spanish, Dutch, or American colonies. According to Williams, the book's publication in 1969 "is particularly timely in the context of the resolute attempt now being made by West Indians themselves to prevent the further fragmentation of the area and present a united front to the outside world."⁴⁰

A number of local histories continued the trend of focusing on the contribution of the local population, but without reference to the importance of literature in defining culture in the region. Hilary Beckles's *A History of Barbados* began with the Amerindian civilization and ended in 1966 when Barbados gained its independence.⁴¹ Her goal was to write from the black perspective because she believed that blacks were marginalized in previous histories. She wanted to show that they played a role in gaining independence with protests that began when they were slaves. Trevor Carmichael edited a volume on

³⁹Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean, 1492-1969* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

⁴⁰Williams, *From Columbus to Castro*, 12.

⁴¹Hilary McD. Beckles, *A History of Barbados: From Amerindian Settlement to Nation-State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

the history of Barbados since independence.⁴² He argued that Barbados's independence marked a clear constitutional break from colonial status, but in terms of culture, religion, education, and politics it represented no break from the past. In terms of culture, he contended that there was no real break after Barbadian independence. He believed that the focus on local culture simply represented a shift in emphasis. Bridget Brereton's *A History of Modern Trinidad, 1783-1962* offers a similar assessment of the history of Trinidad from a political and economic perspective.⁴³ These books all ignored the influence of literature in shaping and defining a West Indian culture.

In an article published in 1997 Gordon Rohlehr, a Guyanese literary critic, wrote about "The Culture of [Eric] Williams: Context, Performance, Legacy."⁴⁴ Except for a brief mention of De Boissiere's *Crown Jewel* and two of Lamming's later novels, the cultural context of the article revolves around the contribution of calypso music which he used to show support for or protest against Williams's actions as prime minister. In 1998 Philip Sherlock and Hazel Bennett wrote *The Story of the Jamaican People*.⁴⁵ They traced the history of Jamaica and paid tribute to the culture that the island inherited from Africa and Asia. They also included a brief discussion of Claude McKay's *Banana Bottom* and its contribution to the "movement towards a Jamaican culture."⁴⁶ They did not, however, continue to trace that development up to the beginnings of West Indian literature. In fact, they made only one brief mention of the contribution of Roger Mais, Jamaica's most famous member of the initial group of West Indian writers. In a final

⁴²Trevor Carmichael, ed., *Barbados: Thirty Years of Independence* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle, 1996).

⁴³Bridget Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad, 1783-1962* (London: Heinemann, 1981).

⁴⁴Gordon Rohlehr, "The Culture of Williams: Context, Performance, Legacy," in *Callaloo* 20 (August 1997): 849-888.

⁴⁵Philip Sherlock and Hazel Bennett, *The Story of the Jamaican People* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle, 1998).

⁴⁶Sherlock and Bennett, *Jamaican People*, 345.

chapter entitled “Culture and Nationhood,” they pointed out the importance of sports, art, music, religion, poetry, and literature in defining a Jamaican culture, but only one paragraph deals with novelists. They listed some Jamaican writers and credited their contribution “in founding a West Indian literature that was soon recognised as a significant contribution to world literature.”⁴⁷ Although the book put more emphasis on the contribution of writers, artists, and musicians than any previous work, the authors did not attempt to trace the parallel development of politics and culture.

The first analyses of West Indian literature itself were written by literary scholars and focused on style and language. Michael Fabre’s analysis of Sam Selvon paid close attention to the style of his novels, the language he used, and the relationship of his work to British novels. When Fabre mentioned the historical reality of life in Trinidad, it was simply as a statement of fact with no attempt to verify or refute the fact and no comment on its significance.⁴⁸ Ian Munro’s study of George Lamming’s work tried to determine how effective Lamming was in exploring the psychological aspects of life in a colonial society. Munro focused on Lamming’s analysis of the creative sterility of the islands and the alienation that life in a colonial society engendered. Munro did not attempt to analyze, however, the ways in which Lamming’s novels provided insight into the lives of lower- and middle-class West Indians, and their relationships to each other and to those in power.⁴⁹

Several years later Kenneth Ramchand wrote *The West Indian Novel and Its Background*.⁵⁰ The book contributed valuable information about the lack of fiction

⁴⁷Sherlock and Bennett, *Jamaican People*, 394.

⁴⁸Michael Fabre, “Samuel Selvon,” in King, ed., *West Indian Literature*, 111-125.

⁴⁹Ian Munro, “George Lamming,” in King, ed., *West Indian Literature*, 126-143.

⁵⁰Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel*.

emanating from the islands before the twentieth century but it too focused on literary analysis. Ramchand discussed the use of language in British and West Indian fiction. He explored the use of African culture in the novels. He made no attempt to relate the novels to political developments in the West Indies. Local conditions were not ignored in the original studies, but they were not important to the analysis. This study, by contrast, seeks to relate the social and cultural conditions portrayed in the novels to political changes occurring at the same time.

Some authors have done specialized studies of specific novels that point out the importance of the social or historical influence of the works, but they do not document the relationship between political and literary developments in the twentieth century. Mark McWatt edited a volume called *West Indian Literature and Its Social Context*.⁵¹ The book contained papers delivered at a conference on West Indian Literature sponsored by the University of the West Indies in 1985. The papers explored the relationship between West Indian literature and society. The general consensus was that the novelists were concerned about social issues and their novels represent an accurate interpretation of that society. In fact, in one article Vishnudat Singh accused Ralph de Boissiere, a Trinidadian novelist, of sacrificing literary technique in favor of a concern for accuracy. Nana Wilson-Tagoë's *Historical Thought and Literary Representation in West Indian Literature* (1998) was a study of West Indian writing and West Indian conceptions of history.⁵² Wilson-Tagoë acknowledged that she was not dealing with history in terms of the events that "shaped life and values in the West Indies [but only] implying a writer's

⁵¹Mark A. McWatt, *West Indian Literature and Its Social Context* (Cave Hill, Barbados: University of the West Indies Press, 1985).

⁵²Nana Wilson-Tagoë, *Historical Thought and Literary Representation in West Indian Literature* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1998),

sense of the meaning of history and the historical process.”⁵³ Although Wilson-Tagoe’s work is a valuable contribution on historical thought in the West Indies, it did not trace the events of history from political and cultural perspectives as this work seeks to do.

Conclusion

Although much has been written about the West Indies and the individual islands, no work to date has attempted to put West Indian literature into a historical perspective. Early studies dealt with local events and local problems in the context of the political and economic relationship between the West Indies and Britain. Many twentieth-century historians of the island also chronicled political and economic developments and relations between island and mother country. When works of West Indies literature emerged in such great numbers in the 1950s, analysts studied them from two perspectives: as literature emanating from a new source, the colonial world; and as the basis of historical representation in post-colonial studies but without reference to actual historic events. Studies of the novels as literature often put the work into an historical perspective, but the purpose of these studies was to analyze the novel as literature, focusing on its construction, inner meaning, and word use. For post-colonialists the novel was the history; the actual day to day events that fueled change on the islands were of little or no concern to them.

The present study is unique in that it seeks to present the novels in relation to social and political developments in the British West Indies. By looking at the events that shaped the British West Indies and individual islands, it will be possible to view the novels to provide a more complete picture of the region in the twentieth century. The first period to consider is the early twentieth century, when West Indians returned from

⁵³Wilson-Tagoe, *Historical Thought*, xi.

service to the British in World War I with a new perspective on their place in colonial society. These men, influenced by the discrimination they endured and educated by new ideas, began to demand more political control of their islands. When the world-wide depression of the 1930s made life even more difficult for rural peasants and urban slum dwellers, political activists gained their support. West Indian authors in the 1930s contributed to the call for changes by writing about the lives of the poorest inhabitants of the islands. After rioting in the late 1930s and service to the British in World War II, rapid changes occurred. Thus the second period we will consider is the post-World War II era. The British were ready to begin the process of abandoning their colonial empire and West Indians were ready to take control of their islands. The process of transferring power finally led to the formation of the West Indies Federation, a cooperative political venture that most island leaders believed was necessary to the attainment of independence. Formed in 1958, the Federation collapsed in 1962 when Jamaica decided not to participate. Meanwhile, West Indian literature emerged in 1950 to challenge colonial rule and attempt to forge a new identity for islands no longer under the control of a colonial power. The third period we will look at is the post-independence era. By the 1960s and 1970s the larger islands gained independence and local political leaders began the process of running their own countries. They struggled to improve the lives of their citizens, often in vain. West Indian authors began to focus their criticism on the new leaders and to identify the problems they encountered. By the time our study ends in 1980, the focus of literature on the islands will become less West Indian and more island- and Caribbean-oriented.

This study contributes to the history of the islands of Jamaica, Trinidad, and Barbados by adding the view of the majority population of the islands to the political and economic record between 1930 and 1980. By relying on West Indian literature, we see the attitudes of the islanders to the events that shaped their lives. We also see the effect of political and economic developments on their lives. West Indian novelists contribute this element to add to the historical record. This study records the importance of West Indian literature to the development of the comprehensive view of West Indian history.

CHAPTER II
THE POLITICAL BEGINNINGS OF WEST INDIAN NATIONALISM
1914-1945

“We owe no debt!”¹

The twentieth century brought a political and literary revolution to the West Indies. Writers became the vanguard of movements to portray the masses sympathetically and promote political and social change. They founded literary magazines. The Creole dialect became the popular and accepted form of literary expression. The concentration of literary talent in the 1930s had never been seen in the islands before and it was the political and social developments of the period that encouraged writers to explore their own culture. This chapter will begin with a brief look at the British history of the islands through the nineteenth century and then take a detailed look at West Indian society and political developments in the early part of the twentieth century. During these years West Indians began to perceive of themselves as different from the British. Experiences overseas during World War I taught them that although they considered themselves British, the British did not treat them the same as soldiers from Britain. They looked for ways to identify themselves as West Indians. In politics,

¹Alfred Cruickshank, “Reply to Message,” in Harvey R. Neptune, *Caliban and the Yankees: Trinidad and the United States Occupation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 33. Cruickshank was a black Trinidadian poet who wrote this poem for the 1933 edition of *The Beacon*, a literary magazine published in Trinidad in the early 1930s. He was writing in response to a poem called “The Message,” by Stephen Haweis, a white resident of the island, who criticized local blacks, who were agitating for increased rights under the British government, for not appreciating the fact that the British had given them their freedom from slavery in the nineteenth century.

some island leaders demanded more autonomy under British colonial rule. This period represented the first organized and sustained challenge to British authority. Although the activists who began their mission of improving life for the average West Indian achieved little in the way of permanent change, they began a process that would grow and develop after World War II. They also took the first steps toward forming a West Indian identity.

Historical Setting

From the time of their discovery by Christopher Columbus explorers treated the West Indian islands as objects to be exploited, not as colonies for settlement. The sugar industry, dependent upon slave labor, shaped the destiny of the islands by the end of the sixteenth century. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries these “Sugar Islands” were a gold mine for both British planters and the home government, which sold the sugar at a huge profit. Many plantation owners over the next centuries would continue to be absentee owners living in Britain. A small number of on-site owners plus attorneys and agents of the absentee owners controlled the political situation on the islands. The home government lacked the resources, power, or organization to take firm control, plus it was concerned more with the economic viability of the region. Britain focused its attention on controlling West Indian trade as it did in all its colonies worldwide. Politically it instituted the representative system of government, a system that it established in the thirteen original British colonies in North America as well. The British allowed each island a representative government, based on the British model, with a British-appointed Governor representing the king, a Council appointed by the king that served in place of the House of Lords because there was no nobility in the islands, and an Assembly elected by free whites that served as a lower house. The British government believed that it could

increase immigration to remote and unsettled colonies by granting British citizens who moved there these rights of Englishmen. Over the years, though, the representative system allowed an increasingly small portion of the local population to control island life.²

After years of changing hands, the islands became definitively British in the early nineteenth century at the close of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe. By then demand for British sugar was declining because of competition from French- and Spanish-controlled islands. The sugar industry was hurt further when Britain abolished the slave trade in 1807, ending a guaranteed labor supply. Emancipation in 1834 was a more serious problem, because the plantation owners lost their labor force when most blacks refused to work on the plantations. Owners brought in European and Indian indentured servants to replace the slaves, but the sugar industry never rebounded fully. Assistance from Britain kept the industry alive, but most islands diversified their agricultural production. Bananas helped the Jamaican economy. Trinidad and Grenada began producing cocoa, which required little capital or labor. Several of the smaller islands relied on sea-island cotton.³ Economic problems would continue to plague the islands even after they gained their independence in the late twentieth century.

Emancipation and the introduction of East Indians also altered social conditions on the islands. Former slaves were prepared to eke out a meager existence on their own rather than work on plantations for wages, another attitude that prevailed into the

²St. Kitts (1624) and Barbados (1627) were the earliest British colonies, followed by Nevis and Montserrat (1628), Antigua (1632), Jamaica (1655), Grenada, Dominica, St. Vincent, and Tobago in 1763, Trinidad in 1797 and St. Lucia in 1803. Barbados was the only one of these islands to remain in British hands without interruption. The system of government put in place on these islands was identical to the one the British used in its North American colonies. See Great Britain, Central Office of Information, *Origins and Purpose: A Handbook on the British Commonwealth and Empire* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1944), 75-77.

³Central Office of Information, *Origins and Purpose*, 77-78.

twentieth century.. The black population became estranged from the East Indians whom planters brought in as indentured servants to replace them at low wages. The result was a growing fear among whites and East Indians of the majority black population. At the same time, East Indians suffered discrimination from whites, who looked down upon them. East Indians worked to retain their religious and cultural traditions, which often left them out of mainstream society even when they moved to urban setting.⁴ Black and East Indians would be vying with each other in the late twentieth century on some islands; by then it would be about political power.

The impetus to change the old Representative System came suddenly in 1865 as a result of the Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica. Jamaica was suffering from the severe financial crisis that had begun with the end of slavery. Three years of drought had made conditions worse. Small protests began over the local government's refusal to come to the aid of the peasants who were suffering the most. Local officials called out the militia to protect participants in a previously scheduled session at the courthouse. When a large crowd throwing stones approached the building, the militia opened fire. The crowd persisted and captured and burned the courthouse. The rioters then turned to the jail, where they released all the prisoners. Some minor rioting occurred the next day. On the third day Governor Edward John Eyre declared martial law and a local militia and British troops hunted down the rioters, called Maroons, many of whom had fled to the hills to avoid capture and continue their resistance. About thirty people died during the event. The incident became famous, though, for the retaliation. About three hundred and fifty

⁴Trinidad and Jamaica have the largest populations of East Indians but only Trinidad experienced prolonged racial tension. The British would end the indenture system in the early twentieth century. Bridget Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad, 1783-1962* (London: Heinemann, 1981), 100; Selwyn D. Ryan, *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago: A Study of Decolonization in a Multiracial Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 21.

blacks were court martialled and executed. Another hundred were shot without trial. Governor Eyre was suspended by the British government in London and later dismissed. After the rebellion, the British home government announced that it would take a leading role in colonial affairs, at the expense of local leadership.⁵

By the time of the rebellion most white West Indians supported the idea of direct rule from Britain, which they believed would leave freed blacks with little influence in the islands. By 1878 the Crown Colony system was widespread.⁶ The system varied slightly from island to island, but the common feature was the power of the Crown to direct colonial affairs at the expense of local British citizens. The Royal Governor, appointed by Britain, had the final say in all matters, but he often considered local white public opinion before making decisions. Every island elected some members to an advisory Legislative Council, to which the crown also appointed members. Elected members, though, usually came from the same white wealthy planter class as appointed members. Britain often listened to input from this group, but London was the final arbiter on all matters. The black and colored, or mixed race, islanders were the leading opponents of the Crown Colony system, because they were the groups that would have benefited from an expanded electorate.⁷

⁵Hume Wrong, *Government of the West Indies* (New York: Negro Universities Press, [1923] 1969), 74-77; Samuel J. Hurwitz and Edith F. Hurwitz, *Jamaica: A Historical Portrait* (New York: Praeger, 1971), 144-150.

⁶The Crown Colony system was not introduced to every colony at once. Trinidad was the first to be converted by the British in 1810; it had had no elected assembly under the Spanish who had controlled the island previously and the British chose not to change the political dynamics. Antigua and Grenada were among the last to convert to the system in 1898. Barbados, which suffered less severely from Emancipation because slaves, with no local land available to them, had remained to work on plantations for a salary, never adopted a formal Crown Colony system. Instead Britain introduced an Executive Committee system in 1881 through which an Executive Committee of elected representatives worked with the Executive Council to introduce legislation. This method also increased Home Government power, but allowed the local Assembly to work as usual. Wrong, *Government*, 82-89.

⁷The early advisory councils sometimes were called Privy Councils, but by 1900 the Executive Council was the common terminology in all the colonies. Central Office of Information, *Origins and*

The early years of the twentieth century brought serious economic crisis to the islands. The sugar industry lost ground to foreign competition in the world market. Hurricanes, four between 1911 and 1921, and drought inflicted further damage on producers. Despite high unemployment among the local black population, planters in Jamaica and Trinidad continued to import East Indian workers rather than pay higher wages to local laborers. Blacks in large numbers left rural areas for towns that they hoped would provide more job opportunities. This was the situation when World War I broke out in Europe.⁸

World War I

World War I was an important turning point in West Indian history. When the war began the War Office was reluctant at first to accept black West Indians into the army because it believed that black men were neither reliable nor capable of aiding the British army, even though they knew that the French were recruiting blacks from its West Indian colonies to serve in their army. As the war wore on into 1915 and the British suffered more losses, the War Office began to reconsider its attitude because it needed soldiers. Then in the spring of 1915 the king intervened; fearing discontent in the colonies he asked the War Office to assign the West Indies Regiment to service. Because the decision to use them had been a political one, there was debate in the army over how exactly to use them.⁹

Purpose, 75-78; Gordon K. Lewis, "British Colonialism in the West Indies: The Political Legacy," *Caribbean Studies* 7 (April 1967): 3-5.

⁸Rhonda Cobham, "The Background," in Bruce King, ed., *West Indian Literature* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1979), 12-13; Ryan, *Race and Nationalism*, 28.

⁹Great Britain, *British Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons)*, October 10 – November 2, 1916, 116-117; Glenford Deroy Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism: A Social History of West Indians in the First World War* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle, 2002), 29-38; C.L. Joseph, "The British West Indies Regiment," *Journal of Caribbean History* 2 (May 1971): 95-99.

Eventually, over 15,000 West Indians served in the British West Indies Regiment under the leadership of white officers during the war. They saw themselves as black English soldiers fighting for the empire, but their regiment was organized as a unit separate from regular units of the British army, as were other colonial regiments. Most island servicemen spent their tour of duty in Egypt performing simple labor. Some did fight in Palestine and Jordan, when the army realized that their frustration and anger at not fighting was being transmitted back home and causing discontent there. The War Office never let them fight against Europeans. In France they were used as laborers.¹⁰

In general, black West Indians were treated poorly in the army, even those with more education than British regulars. They did the worst jobs, while colonial troops from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand were treated as equals, whether working separately in their own units or within the British army.¹¹ West Indian soldiers were assigned to clean latrines and wash clothes.¹² They were given segregated and inferior canteens, cinemas, and hospitals. West Indians received lower rates of pay and smaller allowances than British soldiers.¹³

In 1918 when other imperial troops received a pay raise, the West Indian Regiment did not. In Italy, West Indians mutinied for four days over the pay dispute. Eventually the Colonial Office implored the War Office to change its stance because

¹⁰Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism*, 99, 125; Joseph, "British West Indies Regiment," 94, 100; Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 157.

¹¹White soldiers from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand generally treated the West Indians better, according to some West Indian troops. See Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism*, 127.

¹²Indian and African contingents were used as laborers as well. See Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism*, 129.

¹³Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism*, 122; Joseph, "British West Indies Regiment," 108.

Colonial Office officials feared the dispute would lead to problems on the islands if it was not settled. The War Office relented and gave the raise to all imperial soldiers.¹⁴

After the war ended, members of the West Indies Regiment faced discrimination in England, too. Norman Manley, the future prime minister of Jamaica, practiced law in London after his service during the war. He claimed to face race hostility and suspicion in the city. Some black islanders reported being assaulted in other parts of the country as well. Many islanders came home critical of British government and British society.¹⁵

At the same time, those who served overseas were introduced to new ideas, particularly Fabian socialist ideas within the British Labour Party. Although the Fabians supported British imperialism, they advocated granting national self-government to colonies. In addition, they supported programs to improve the lives of workers, including health insurance and unemployment compensation. West Indians came home with a desire to change the islands, which the British still governed under the Crown Colony system that gave them absolute control.¹⁶

Another group of West Indians who were introduced to new ideas in the early years of the twentieth century were those who went to work overseas. The most popular destinations were Cuba, the Panama Canal Zone, and the United States. An estimated 45,000 Barbadians alone worked in Panama building the canal. Many returned home when the project was completed with flashy clothes and jewelry, and most importantly, money. In Barbados returnees used money earned in Panama to create friendly societies, working-class financial institutions that were independent of the planter-merchant

¹⁴Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 157; Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism*, 160-167.

¹⁵Norman Manley, "The Autobiography of Norman Washington Manley," *Jamaica Journal* 7 (March-June 1973), 14.

¹⁶Gordon K. Lewis, *Slavery, Imperialism, and Freedom: Studies in English Radical Thought* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), 226-259.

monetary institutions. They could afford to provide for their families and educate their children. They had witnessed confrontations between American workers and businessmen while West Indian workers showed respect to their white British bosses for fear of losing their jobs. The returning workers brought news of their experiences home with them. As economies in Cuba and the United States entered periods of recession and depression in the post-war world, islanders working there would leave for home, too.¹⁷

All these men returned to islands in economic distress but without the political influence to change local conditions. The sugar estates continued to play an important role in the island economies. In the early twentieth century those on Barbados, Antigua, St. Kitts, and to some extent Jamaica, were owned by white individuals or local companies dominated by the white population; a small minority were the property of absentee British landlords. In Trinidad sugar estates were in the hands of larger companies, most of whose shareholders lived in Britain. These estates ranged in size from 2,000 to 10,000 acres. Estates growing other crops, which existed on most islands, ranged in size from 100 to 2,000 acres.¹⁸

A small group of black and colored owners had property that ranged in size from 15 to 100 acres. The original owners were generally free blacks or mixed race Creole descendants of white owners who were able to purchase land in the nineteenth century.

¹⁷The British estimated that between 1906 and 1910 Barbadians working outside the island contributed L65,000 to the local economy. See Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Colonial Annual Reports: Barbados, 1960 and 1961* (Bridgetown: Barbados Government Printing Office, 1962), 118; Cobham, "The Background," 14; Hilary McD. Beckles, *A History of Barbados: From Amerindian Settlements to Nation-State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 143-145, 151.

¹⁸Great Britain, Colonial Office, *West India Royal Commission Report* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1945), 42.

Some of these farmers survived on their production, but most supplemented their income by working on estates when work was available to them.¹⁹

The majority of the rural population was made up of peasants. Most owned between one- and ten-acre plots of land, usually purchased by freed slaves who pooled their money to buy what they could afford and then divided it up. Most of these farmers rented land away from their own holdings to supplement their income. Many who could not afford to buy land leased it from the larger plantation owners. Few peasants were able to buy enough land to support a family at even a minimum standard of living. As a result almost all peasants had regular seasonal employment on plantations to supplement their meager income. The poorest rural inhabitants lived in “trash” houses, built of leaves and other vegetation intertwined with rough poles. Most rural islanders lived in extremely poor but less severe conditions. Some rural houses were built of corrugated iron with board or dirt floors. Sanitation and clean water were always a problem. Water-borne diseases like diarrhea and dysentery were the chief cause of death in Trinidad in 1911.²⁰

The depression in the rural areas increased migration to the towns where jobs were also in short supply. Some of the unemployed resorted to crime and prostitution to survive. The peasant mentality persisted, though with many doing just enough work to survive. Their lack of education contributed to their inability to get well-paying jobs. The city poor lived in barrack-yards, which Eric Williams, the Prime Minister of Trinidad, described as “a relic of slavery . . . that reflected the all-pervading poverty. The bed of

¹⁹Colonial Office, *West India Royal Commission Report*, 42.

²⁰In 1913 an estimated thirteen thousand peasants owned lots of five acres or less. In Barbados in 1930 there were nine plantations of over five hundred acres and fourteen thousand peasants with less than one acre apiece. See Colonial Office, *Barbados, 1960-1961*, 118; Colonial Office, *West India Royal Commission Report*, 42-43, 154-155; Eric Williams, *Inward Hunger: The Education of a Prime Minister* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 18.

boards without mattress, the box substitutes for chairs, the tin cup, the absence of knives and forks, the oil lamp or candle.”²¹ They were crowded and usually lacked sanitation and a clean water supply.²²

Social relationships contributed to the hard conditions the peasants and urban slum dwellers experienced. In the 1930s cohabitation without marriage and illegitimacy were common among the peasant community. Estimates of illegitimacy on the islands ranged from sixty to seventy percent. West Indians argued that their reluctance to marry was a legacy of slavery, because slaves were not allowed to wed. Whatever the reason it began, there was no social pressure on the islanders to adapt to what the British considered more conventional marital arrangements. Many peasants who did live together and raise children never married either. This habit led to a number of problems. The children born into these situations were the poorest on the islands, especially when the mother was left alone to support them. These children were the least educated, partly because there was little emphasis placed on education in this type of family setting, and partly because children had to work to help support the family.²³

Whatever the economic status of blacks, they could do little to change their circumstances. In the West Indies monetary and property qualifications restricted the vote to the white and colored elite. The colored middle class was composed of light skinned blacks. In the West Indies a white skin represented social status. The closer an individual’s skin tone was to white, the more opportunities he had to get a good job and

²¹Williams, *Inward Hunger*, 17.

²²Great Britain, *West India Royal Commission Report*, 42-43, 154-155; De Lisle Worrell, “The Barbados Economy,” *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 42 (1994-1995), 75-76; Williams, *Inward Hunger*, 17-18.

²³Colonial Office, *West India Royal Commission Report*, 220-222; Williams, *Inward Hunger*, 17-18.

possibly even to be accepted into British West Indian society. This class differentiation arose in the nineteenth century societal control imposed by the British that enforced their superiority. The British hired islanders with lighter skin tones for civil service jobs, thus creating this colored middle class that identified with British social and political standards. This trend of adopting British customs would continue to be a problem for the islands in years to come and lead to charges that the new black political leaders were trying to act like the British rather than help the masses.²⁴

Soldiers and émigrés also came home from World War I to a potential political electorate that was uneducated. Only slightly over half of the school age children in the West Indies in the 1920s and 30s attended school on a regular basis. Most of the elementary schools were located in urban settings, so those that attended were the middle-class city children and a small number of poor blacks. White children usually went to private schools. Rural schools were rare; poor children there had little opportunity to get an education in the early twentieth century. The white rural population sent their children who were not attending a local private school to England for an education. According to Eric Williams, who was a product of Trinidad's education system under the British, educating the islanders was not a priority of the British. What could have been an opportunity to ease the problems of racial tension on Trinidad by establishing one system of education for all children, instead only accentuated the existing problem of separation of the classes.²⁵

The basic textbooks, used in most island primary schools until the 1960s and in some cases into the 1970s, were the *Royal Readers*. In these West Indian students

²⁴Eric Williams, *The Negro in the Caribbean* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1942), 64-65; Colonial Office, *West India Royal Commission Report*, 58-61.

²⁵Williams, *The Negro in the Caribbean*, 75-78; Williams, *Inward Hunger*, 22.

learned about English houses, English customs, and the English language. One examination question asked students to identify the seasons, on islands that had no seasons. Students learned to handle money based on the British pound but shopped in British West Indies dollars. According to Williams, “My training was divorced from anything remotely suggestive of Trinidad and the West Indies. The divorce began in the primary school. My mathematical problems dealt with pounds, shillings and pence in the classroom, but I had to reckon in dollars and cents when I went shopping for my mother.”²⁶

A child educated at the secondary level in England or the islands received the same type of education, based on an English classical education. In Trinidad, only three of about two hundred students went on to secondary school in the 1930s. Students still took the Junior Cambridge examination, a university qualifying exam which was not taken in government-funded English schools. Children learned about English kings and queens, not about West Indies history. There was no mention of slavery in the West Indies. They studied English literature, including Shakespeare and Jane Austen. There was no relevance to the everyday life of a student.²⁷

Most West Indians who wanted a higher education went abroad, at their own expense or on scholarship. The competition among male students for the few available scholarships was fierce; girls were not eligible for scholarships. Even if a student was

²⁶Helen Tiffin, “Plato’s Cave,” in Bruce King, ed., *New National and Post-Colonial Literatures: An Introduction* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1996), 147-148; Williams, *Inward Hunger*, 24, 35.

²⁷Colonial Office, *West India Royal Commission Report*, 125-126; Williams, *The Negro in the Caribbean*, 76; Edward Kamau Brathwaite, “Nation Language,” in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 310; Williams, *Inward Hunger*, 23.

lucky enough to win one, in England he was still a colonial. Williams believed that no native, no matter how well prepared, could fit into Oxford society.²⁸

The combination of outside influences and distressed conditions on the island led to the first organized efforts on the part of West Indians to increase the amount of influence they wielded at home. The men who had experienced racism during their service in World War I took the new ideas to which they had been introduced overseas and tried to use them to change life at home. The men who had made money working overseas supported the actions of these men because they wanted more economic opportunities at home. In order to effect any real change, though, they had to improve economic conditions for the majority black population of the islands. To influence change, these men had to acquire political influence.

Political Developments of the 1920s-30s

Activism in the British Caribbean after World War I began with the organization of labor unions which made political demands. Many returning soldiers believed their service to the British during the war had earned them the right to demand more influence in determining the course of West Indian history. In Trinidad in 1919 and 1920, the revived Trinidad Workingmen's Association (TWA) organized a series of strikes by urban industrial dock workers to protest rising food and clothing prices, which the workers believed the merchant elite was imposing unnecessarily, and the difficulty in finding employment.²⁹ The TWA spoke for skilled black workers, many of whom had

²⁸Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Report of the West Indies Committee of the Commission on Higher Education in the Colonies* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1945), 10-11; Williams, *Inward Hunger*, 35.

²⁹The TWA was founded in 1897 as the first workers movement in Trinidad. Interest in the organization faded over time, although it remained in operation until its revival in 1919. See Amon Saba Saakana, *The Colonial Legacy in Caribbean Literature* (London: Karnak House, 1987), 66; Ryan, *Race and Nationalism*, 26-27.

fought or worked overseas. The strikes lasted for fourteen days; when violence erupted, the British intervened militarily. However, the growing support in favor of increased political representation for non-whites in the islands convinced the Secretary of State for the Colonies to launch an investigation into the political situation in the West Indies.³⁰

Major E. F. L. Wood, the parliamentary undersecretary for the islands at the time and later Lord Halifax, led the investigation. The Wood Report (1922) warned that “the whole history of the African population of the West Indies inevitably drives them towards representative institutions fashioned after the British model. . . . We shall be wise if we avoid the mistake of endeavoring to withhold a concession ultimately inevitable until it has been robbed by delay of most of its usefulness and of all its grace.”³¹ The report recommended that a minority of elected members be included on Legislative Councils but that they be elected on a restricted franchise. Jamaica and Barbados already had elected members; in 1924 Trinidad held elections. The elections made little difference. Only about six per cent of residents qualified to vote. With little leadership and no political parties to guide voters, the few islanders who voted elected the same conservative, white, middle-class men who would have been appointed by the government.³²

³⁰Viranjini Munasinghe, *Callaloo Or Tossed Salad: East Indians and the Cultural Politics of Identity in Trinidad* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 189-190; Ayearst, *British West Indies*, 33; Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 157, 160; Saakana, *Colonial Legacy*, 23; Scott D. MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago: Democracy and Development in the Caribbean* (New York: Praeger, 1986), 49-50; Ryan, *Race and Nationalism*, 29.

³¹Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Report by the Hon. E.F.L. Wood, M.P. on his visit to the West Indies and British Guiana* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1922), 6-7.

³²Colonial Office, *Wood Report*, 10; Eric Williams, *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago* (New York: Praeger, [1962] 1964), 216-219; Colin A. Hughes, “Semi-Responsible Government in the British West Indies,” *Political Science Quarterly* 68 (September 1953), 339; Ayearst, *British West Indies*, 34-35; Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 165; MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 52; Ryan, *Race and Nationalism*, 30-34; Munasinghe, *Callaloo*, 188.

One notable exception was Captain Andrew A. Cipriani of Trinidad, an upper middle-class white-skinned Creole of French descent who appealed to the common man. While serving in the British West Indies Regiment in France during World War I, he had fought unsuccessfully to get blacks equal treatment. He returned to Trinidad and became the leader of the TWA in 1923. Cipriani described the organization as an educational association. It provided him with a loyal electorate and would set the pattern for successful West Indian politicians of the future. Cipriani worked through the parliamentary system but consistently defended workers' interests by attacking employers and the government. He taught Trinidad's workers that they could oppose colonialism and channel their social discontent into political activity. He worked to achieve compulsory education and to remove franchise qualifications. He urged the British to introduce workmen's compensation, a minimum wage, and an eight-hour day. He opposed all forms of discrimination. Throughout his career both the British and the local middle class opposed his efforts. Local employers used intimidation tactics against workers who considered joining the union, often threatening to fire them.³³

The tight control that Britain exercised over unions caused many leaders to shift their emphasis to direct political action. When Trinidad enacted a trade-union ordinance in 1932 it provided little protection for unions. It did not allow them the right to picket peacefully and provided no immunity from legal action. It did not let unions to register under the Companies Ordinance, which the TWA had done, and it prohibited the use of trade union funds for political purposes. Cipriani decided not to register the TWA as a

³³Great Britain, British Information Services, *Trinidad and Tobago: The Making of a Nation* (New York: British Information Services, 1962), 7; Ayearst, *British West Indies*, 34-35; Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 167-168; Gordon K. Lewis, *The Growth of the Modern West Indies* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1968), 202-207; MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 50-51; Ryan, *Race and Nationalism*, 34-38; Murasinghe, *Callaloo*, 189.

union. Instead, he disbanded the organization in 1934 and replaced it with the Trinidad Labour Party of which he became head. He switched his emphasis from strikes to political agitation.³⁴

In Barbados events developed along similar lines in the same period. Blacks in Barbados organized a variety of self-help socio-economic organizations such as friendly societies and lodges which provided aid to those in need. They also founded the Barbados Labour Union in 1919. By the mid-1920s Barbadians came to believe that mass political action could provide better options for meeting social and economic needs than unions could. In 1924 Charles Duncan O’Neale, a middle-class black socialist, organized the Democratic League (DL), the first political party in Barbados supported by black and middle-class professionals and the black working poor. It worked to expand political activism among the middle class. When O’Neal died in 1936, however, the DL collapsed.³⁵

Meanwhile Grantley Adams was elected to the Barbados House of Representatives in 1934 as a candidate representing the black middle class. Adams believed that it was the deteriorating economic and social conditions of the workers, and not the Crown Colony system, that were the underlying cause of strife in Barbados. He believed he could accomplish more if he had the support of the Colonial Office. Adams argued that raising wages was the solution to all working-class problems.³⁶

³⁴F. W. Dalley, *Report on Trade Union Organisation and Industrial Relations, 1947* (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1947), 5; Ryan, *Race and Nationalism*, 37; Kelvin Singh, *Race and Class Struggles in a Colonial State: Trinidad, 1917-1945* (Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 1994), 111-112.

³⁵Beckles, *History of Barbados*, 154-156; W. Marvin Will, “Insurrection and the Development of Political Institutions: The 1937 Rebellion and the Birth of Labour Parties and Labour Unions in Barbados,” *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 40 (1992), 16-17.

³⁶Beckles, *History of Barbados*, 164-168; Will, “Insurrection,” 16.

In 1937 a new leader emerged. Clement Payne arrived in Barbados from Trinidad, where he had been born to Barbadian parents. A gifted speaker, he rallied crowds by promising to educate them and to agitate for better conditions. He described middle-class coloreds as lackeys of employers more concerned with their own position in society than with curing the ills of the majority of the population. He encouraged mass participation in the political process by blacks and promised to work to develop labor and political organizations on the island.³⁷ After British officials secretly deported Payne during riots in Bridgetown, Adams, who believed Payne was too radical, stepped in to mediate the situation. Adams continued to work with the British to improve life in Barbados as he had in the past, by supporting British rule while lobbying for increased wages to improve the economy.³⁸

In Jamaica Marcus Garvey founded the People's Political Party (PPP) in 1929. Garvey was born and raised in rural Jamaica. He had been active in promoting black pride and black culture through the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) which he founded in 1914. UNIA encouraged blacks to achieve success through education. It focused on developing a sense of African nationalism and anti-imperialism and encouraged literary and artistic expression among its members. In 1918 Garvey opened a branch of UNIA in New York City and spent most of the next nine years in the United States.³⁹ The PPP endorsed constitutional change to give Jamaica representation

³⁷Will, "Insurrection," 12.

³⁸Adams, in his capacity as a lawyer, represented Payne when he was accused of making a false declaration of his birthplace and won his release but authorities arrested Payne again and deported him on July 26, 1937. Will, "Insurrection," 12.

³⁹Garvey was convicted of fraud for selling stock in the Black Star Shipping Company through the mail in 1925 and sent to jail in Atlanta. In 1927 he was released and deported to Jamaica. See Philip Sherlock and Hazel Bennett, *The Story of the Jamaican People* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle, 1998), 306-307; Peter Abrahams, *Jamaica: An Island Mosaic* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1957), 164-168.

in the British Parliament. It advocated minimum wage legislation, promotion of local industries, land reform, and public housing. Garvey called for set hours and wage guidelines for sugar workers and legislation that would end the exploitation of children. Inspired by Garvey, Kingston dock workers unsuccessfully went on strike in May 1919 for higher wages and double time on Sundays.⁴⁰ In 1935 Garvey moved to England and the party collapsed. He died there in 1940. Despite the fact that the organization was short-lived, it had a significant impact on the West Indian working classes. Labor leaders who followed would build on the racial consciousness that Garvey inspired.⁴¹

The increased political power of blacks made little difference to prevailing political and social conditions. The Crown Colony system was still in place. The Colonial Office was adept at granting limited reforms such as the restricted franchise to keep the islanders from initiating violent protest. The result was little change in the system. As the 1930s progressed, though, the black working class became more strident in its demands.

The 1930s were difficult years in the islands. The world-wide depression caused severe problems. Exports dropped and world prices fell for goods that could be sold, including sugar, which continued to be a major source of income on most islands. Unemployment rose. Workers were particularly critical of government employees who still had jobs – jobs that were not open to most of the population. West Indian peasants

⁴⁰Sherlock and Bennett, *Jamaican People*, 292-310; George T. Daniel, "Labor and Nationalism in the British Caribbean," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 310 (March 1957): 168.

⁴¹Sherlock and Bennett, *Jamaican People*, 313-314; Daniel, "Labor and Nationalism," 168.

were hit even harder than urban workers. Rural peasant protests propelled East Indians into labor movements in Trinidad for the first time.⁴²

Political concessions by the British had little effect on the economy. Exports remained down. There was little attempt on the part of the British government, which did not intervene at home either, or local leaders to diversify the economy. As late as 1938 unskilled sugar workers earned very low wages: thirty cents in Barbados; thirty-five cents in Trinidad; and forty-eight to sixty cents in Jamaica.⁴³ The problem of low pay was compounded by the fact that work on sugar estates was seasonal. During slow periods, lasting about 6 months, employment dropped by fifty percent. In Jamaica, nearly half the wage-earning population was engaged in seasonal work and about eleven per cent were unemployed continuously. In Trinidad, agricultural workers were employed on average four days a week. In Barbados, living standards for agricultural workers were at late nineteenth-century levels.⁴⁴ To make matters worse, many West Indians who had worked in Cuba and the United States also lost their jobs and returned home. Their numbers increased the unemployment rate at the same time that their families lost the subsidies they had been receiving from these overseas jobs. Eric Williams estimates that in Barbados residents had received an amount equal to one-third of the island's total exports in subsidies from relatives working overseas. Much of this money was lost due to unemployment. Trinidad's economy did not suffer as much as some others; it benefited from the oil industry. Unskilled oil workers there made

⁴²Ayearst, *British West Indies*, 36-37; Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 171; Lewis, *The Modern West Indies*, 122.

⁴³At the same time unskilled sugar workers in Cuba made eighty cents a day. West Indians reported monetary figures in West Indian dollars. In the same time period, the British used figures based on the British pound in their reports. See Williams, *From Columbus to Castro*, 444; Williams, *Inward Hunger*, 35. See the discussion of Williams's views earlier in this chapter.

⁴⁴Williams, *From Columbus to Castro*, 443-446; Ayearst, *British West Indies*, 40; Beckles, *History of Barbados*, 163.

seventy-two cents a day. Yet they were not compensated for industrial accidents or overtime work and had no retirement plan. Still, most workers held lower paying jobs in agriculture that paid twenty to forty cents a day even in Trinidad.⁴⁵

Economic discontent brought strikes, which often ended in violence. The first occurred on sugar estates in Trinidad in 1934. The following year there was a march of wharf workers protesting unemployment in Jamaica. In 1937 and 1938 more rioting occurred in Trinidad, Barbados, and Jamaica. In Trinidad what started as an oil strike turned into a general strike and led to a sympathetic strike in Barbados, which escalated when the British deported Clement Payne, a labor leader who was demanding trade unions. Jamaica had another sugar strike, which began at the Frome Estate of the West Indies Sugar Company when the company announced job openings. Hundreds showed up for just a few positions. Those who did not get work rioted. From there the riots spread to include unemployed workers in Kingston.⁴⁶

The level of participation differentiated these strikes from previous ones. In the past strikes were the work of the black and colored middle class demanding a real share in the government process. In the late 1930s strikes were led by the black working class demanding a government that would respond to the economic crisis. Although racial tensions were on the increase by the late 1930s, particularly because poor blacks suffered most from economic distress and had few options available to improve their lives, and the strikes often led to riots, black workers did not target whites and there was very little

⁴⁵Ayearst, *British West Indies*, 37-38; Williams, *The Negro in the Caribbean*, 143; Williams, *From Columbus to Castro*, 443; Munasinghe, *Callaloo*, 192.

⁴⁶Colonial Office, *West Indian Royal Commission Report*, 196; Ayearst, *British West Indies*, 38-39; T.S. Simey, *Welfare and Planning in the West Indies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), 23-24; Williams, *The Negro in the Caribbean*, 93; Cobham, "The Background," 16; Williams, *From Columbus to Castro*, 473-474; Sherlock and Bennett, *The Story of the Jamaican People*, 363-364; Hurwitz and Hurwitz, *Jamaica*, 194.

property destroyed. Once the police or military arrived, the riots generally ended quickly but peacefully. Over the entire period twenty-four died and 115 were wounded.⁴⁷

The strikes of the late 1930s gave rise to the labor leaders and political parties that would guide West Indians toward independence. In 1938 Alexander Bustamante, a colored Jamaican, began to make speeches supporting the striking workers in Kingston, who adopted him as their spokesman. Bustamante, a money lender who had no high school diploma, went to Cuba, Panama, and New York in search of work and returned to Jamaica in 1934 when he could no longer find any. Peter Abrahams, who interviewed Bustamante in 1956, described him as a colorful, flamboyant, and theatrical man who spoke the language of the streets.⁴⁸ He railed against the poverty in Kingston, attacked the ineffectiveness of the Legislative Council, and the lack of concern among employers for the plights of their workers. In 1938, after the Frome riot, he was arrested along with some of the strikers. After authorities released him, he founded the Bustamante Industrial Trades Union (BITU) in May 1938, which accepted all workers. Within months it had a membership of several thousand agricultural and waterfront workers. British officials jailed Bustamante again from 1940 to 1942 for subversive activities. Upon his release he founded the Jamaican Labour Party (JLP), which drew its support largely from the BITU and worked on behalf of the working class and poor peasants. Many West Indian political parties included the word “labour” in their title in order to get

⁴⁷Ayearst, *British West Indies*, 38-39; Simey, *Welfare and Planning*, 23-24; Williams, *The Negro in the Caribbean*, 93.

⁴⁸Abrahams, *Jamaica*, 171. Alex Zeidenfelt described Bustamante as reckless, using “rough and tumble tactics which are generally frowned upon by the more orthodox and conventional union leaders.” Alex Zeidenfelt, “Political and Constitutional Developments in Jamaica,” *Journal of Politics* 14 (August 1952): 532.

worker support. Despite its use by the JLP, the party favored the expansion of capitalism and the free enterprise system.⁴⁹

Not all Jamaicans subscribed to Bustamante's views. Norman Manley, from a colored middle-class family and a cousin of Bustamante, was a British-educated lawyer and a Rhodes Scholar. He served in the British army from 1915 to 1919, finished his Oxford education and returned to Jamaica in 1922. In 1936 he negotiated a deal with the United Fruit Company to establish the Jamaica Welfare Ltd., a fund to be used for the welfare of the rural population. The goals of the organization were to help people take advantage of opportunities and to inspire hope and self-confidence. The Jamaica Welfare group worked through education to find solutions to rural problems and implement those solutions. It operated until 1949. Manley founded the competition to Bustamante, the People's National Party (PNP), in September 1938, "to support the progressive forces of this country and to raise the living standard of life of the common people of this country."⁵⁰ Manley spoke for middle-class reformers who accepted capitalism and private ownership but wanted social reform, like land reform, more educational opportunities, cooperative ownership, progressive taxation, and expanding government services, and who wanted greater political influence. Manley was careful, though, to support labor issues in order to gain worker support. He insisted that those seeking increased political power and those aspiring to economic self-sufficiency were working toward a common goal. PNP leaders described the party as socialist, although social

⁴⁹Abrahams, *Jamaica*, 171; Daniel, "Labor and Nationalism," 167; Ayearst, *British West Indies*, 40-41; John D. Forbes, *Jamaica: Managing Political and Economic Change* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1985), 10; *London Times*, 25 May 1950, 4; Sherlock and Bennett, *Jamaican People*, 364-365; Hurwitz and Hurwitz, *Jamaica*, 196-197; Carl Stone, "Decolonization and the Caribbean State System: The Case of Jamaica," in Paget Henry and Carl Stone, eds., *The Newer Caribbean: Decolonization, Democracy, and Development* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1983), 47.

⁵⁰*The Daily Gleaner*, 19 September 1938, 1.

democratic would be more accurate, with ties to the British Labour Party. Manley insisted that PNP socialism was neither revolutionary nor anti-religious, but rather democratic and Christian. The three basic goals of the PNP in its early years were self-government, universal adult suffrage, and social reforms, the most important of which was public ownership of Jamaica's major resources. Even the PNP, though, cooperated with the British to achieve their goals.⁵¹

In Trinidad, too, it was the deteriorating economic conditions of most workers that precipitated strikes in the 1930s. Workers were finding it increasingly difficult just to survive. Tubal Uriah Butler, a black agitator who would replace Cipriani as Trinidad's labor leader, organized oilfield workers in the mid-1930s. Eric Williams described Butler as "a queer political concoction of God, Marx and the British Empire."⁵² Butler was born in Grenada, served in the West Indies Regiment, and moved to Trinidad in the early 1930s to work in the oil fields. He could appeal directly to oil workers because he was one of them. Butler was loyal to Britain, believing that he was defending the rights of British citizens in Trinidad. He blamed the island's problems on foreign-owned businesses. In 1937, he formed the Negro Welfare, Social, and Cultural Association to lobby for trade union and health insurance laws, increased access to upper level government positions for blacks, and social legislation for workers. His program particularly appealed to black industrial workers in the oil fields. They worked for foreign-owned companies, under white foreign managers with a high standard of living,

⁵¹Ayearst, *British West Indies*, 41; Forbes, *Jamaica*, 10; Wendell Bell, *Jamaican Leaders: Political Attitudes in a New Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1914), 17; Rex Nettleford, ed., *Norman Manley and the New Jamaica: Selected Speeches and Writings, 1938-68* (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1971), xiv, xvi, 4, 57-64; Stone, *Class*, 151-152; Hurwitz and Hurwitz, *Jamaica*, 197; Stone, "Decolonization, 47; Abrahams, *Jamaica*, 152-153; Zeidenfelt, "Political and Constitutional Developments in Jamaica," 535-536.

⁵²Williams, *The Negro in the Caribbean*, 93.

while they remained extremely poor. In June 1937 he organized a peaceful strike that turned violent when the police tried to arrest him. Butler remained in hiding until 1938. Even when the British offered a \$500 reward for his arrest, West Indian workers refused to turn him in, although no worker could hope to earn that amount in five years. When the British offered him safe passage to give evidence before a British Commission, Butler accepted; the British arrested him. Even after his imprisonment, Butler continued to support the British government, believing that it was local rulers and the oil companies that were to blame for Trinidad's problems. Without Butler's influence, though, a more moderate labor movement asserted itself under the leadership of Adrian Rienzi, a Trinidadian of East Indian descent.⁵³

In Barbados, too, an extremely small segment of society had any political power to change economic conditions. In 1938 only 3.3 per cent of Barbadians were registered to vote.⁵⁴ Grantley Adams exploited the situation in Barbados to his own benefit. He was unusual among West Indian labor leaders of the period because he was critical of worker radicalism, although he appealed for their support in favor of moderate reform. Adams was a founding member of the Barbados Progressive League in 1938. The League's program called for opening the political system to more people by raising wages and for working within the existing system to promote change. When Parliament approved the Trade Union Act in 1940, which formally allowed unions on the islands,

⁵³Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 100; Williams, *The Negro in the Caribbean*, 94; Williams, *History*, 233-234; MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 59-60; Ryan, *Race and Nationalism*, 45-47; Singh, *Race and Class*, 163-164, 170.

⁵⁴Will, "Insurrection," 16.

Adams and his supporters formed the Barbados Workers' Union. Adams became its first president.⁵⁵

After a report on the disturbances of the 1930s predicted there would be more trouble, the British launched a more thorough investigation of conditions on the islands. In 1938 the British government appointed a royal commission under the chairmanship of Lord Moyne, a former conservative Member of Parliament, to provide a summary of the situation in the West Indies. The Commission was composed of British citizens living in England; no islanders were appointed to the body. The Moyne Commission members traveled to each island to view the situation for themselves and to listen to testimony. Because so many islanders wanted to testify before the Commission, its members decided to give preference to representatives of organizations that had submitted written reports. Among those selected to appear in person were representatives of the Colonial Administration, producers associations, labor unions, and churches. In addition, the Commission accepted written evidence from anyone, even those who could not testify in person. One reason the Commission chose to limit the number of witnesses it heard was because the members wanted to reserve time to view conditions on the islands personally. The Commission began and ended its investigation in London by hearing testimony from current and former colonial officials. The Moyne Commission report, issued in 1945, would lead to widespread changes in the region after World War II.⁵⁶

In sum, political activism among West Indians increased tremendously in the 1930s. Labor unions and worker organizations provided support for reform measures.

⁵⁵Beckles, *History of Barbados*, 168-171, 177; Will, "Insurrection," 17, 67-68.

⁵⁶Colonial Office, *West India Royal Commission Report*, xi-xiv, 457-475; Ayearst, *British West Indies*, 41; Beckles, *History of Barbados*, 175-176; the findings of the Moyne Commission are discussed later in this chapter.

Results were limited though. Some labor leaders were elected to government office, but they remained in the minority with little influence. Politically, the islands had made little progress in the interim years. The Crown Colony system of government was still in place. Property and income qualifications continued to limit the franchise. In Trinidad in 1939 an individual had to earn over \$300 a year to register to vote – at a time when agricultural workers made as little as twenty-five cents a day. In order to be eligible for a seat on the Legislative Council a candidate had to own real estate valued at \$10,000 or have an income from real estate of \$1,000 a year. There were variations of the system on other islands, but the results were the same. Approximately 6.5 per cent of the population of Trinidad voted; 5.5 per cent in Jamaica; 3.4 per cent in Barbados.⁵⁷

World War II

When World War II broke out in September 1939, the islands came to the aid of Britain once again. Thousands of West Indian men and women served overseas during the war. The West Indies Regiment had been disbanded after World War I, but some 5,500 West Indians served in the Royal Air Force and thousands more joined the Merchant Marine and did civilian war work in Britain. They too would return wanting changes at home, just as their counterparts after World War I had done. West Indians in Britain saw British workers who seemed to enjoy more privileges than they did at home. They became more aware of the Indian demand for independence when they encountered soldiers from that country.⁵⁸

⁵⁷Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Return showing the composition of the local legislatures in the West Indies and in British Guiana* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1939), 4; Williams, *The Negro in the Caribbean*, 62; Elisabeth Wallace, *The British Caribbean: From Colonialism to the End of Federation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 56.

⁵⁸Great Britain, Colonial Office *Colonial Annual Reports: Barbados, 1947* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1948), 3; Great Britain, Colonial Office, *British Dependencies in the Caribbean and North Atlantic, 1939-1952* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1952), 6-7; Anton L.

Although reform continued during the war years, the pace slowed significantly. The British released a summary of the recommendations of the Moyne Commission but delayed issuing the full report until the war ended. The main conclusion of the Commission was that the West Indies needed social services that it could not afford to implement. The main problems cited for the West Indies included population increases which led to higher unemployment, poor housing conditions, and defects in the education system. Overcrowding and slum conditions were worse in towns but apparent in villages as well. Unemployment was most serious in towns, complicated by continuing increased migration from rural to urban areas. In 1942 per capita annual income in Barbados was L27, and in Jamaica L26; in Britain per capita income was L100. In all the islands a small percentage of the population received most of the income. In Jamaica, 2.5 per cent of all families received 13 per cent of national income. In Barbados, seven per cent of families earned thirty per cent of income. With few prospects for new jobs, the picture seemed unlikely to change significantly.⁵⁹

Trinidad was an exception to this generally bleak picture in some ways. Oil reserves provided Trinidad with a higher national income. Oil workers earned an average of L48 per annum compared to L21 per annum for an adult male sugar or cocoa worker. In 1939 the island, with the approval of the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, launched a TT\$14 million Five Year Plan. Money went to slum clearance, housing for lower-income citizens, the development of an airport, and improvements in the rural

Allahar, *Caribbean Charisma: Reflections on Leadership, Legitimacy and Populist Politics* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2001), 27-28.

⁵⁹In 1942, BWI\$4.80 = L1; Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Development and Welfare in the West Indies, 1943-1944* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1945), 2, 11, 15-18; Colonial Office, *Barbados, 1947*, 4; Colonial Office, *British Dependencies*, 3; C.W.W. Greenridge, "The Present Outlook in the British West Indies," *Caribbean Commission Monthly Information Bulletin*, 2 (July 1949), 362.

water supply. A second plan in 1942 provided TT\$22 million for hospital buildings, roads, drainage and irrigation. Trinidad was the only island with enough money available to fund a substantial portion of its own development, although it too needed funds from British to supplement its programs.⁶⁰

As a result of the recommendations of the Moyne Commission, the British passed the Colonial Development and Welfare Act (1940) which authorized L50,000,000 for development and welfare projects in the colonial empire. In order to bring some relief to the islands most in need, Sir Frank Stockdale, comptroller for Development and Welfare in the West Indies, recommended greater industrialization, home industries, vocational training, establishment of a tourist trade, greater expenditures on social services, improved housing, and public works projects. He criticized West Indians for not working harder; if they did, he said, imports would increase. Consultations among the Development and Welfare office, local governments, and individuals in the West Indies resulted in recommendations and plans for specific projects, but no actual projects. Stockdale explained this by criticizing the lack of public information channels on the islands, saying it was difficult to communicate ideas and to explain economic problems to workers. In general, he believed that Britain would have to contribute even more money if changes on the islands were to occur. Local communities could not afford to finance change, even though they had to be active participants in reform. In fact, it was the regional approach to development that was the problem. Individual islands proposed projects, generally small in scope, that benefited their own populace. Larger islands were reluctant to aid the smaller islands. At the same time, the smaller islands were in the worst position to fund their own development. Stockdale accused authorities in Britain of

⁶⁰British Information Services, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 18-19; Singh, *Race and Class*, 160.

failing to make a comprehensive examination of the needs of the region, although the Moyne Commission had done that prior to the war.⁶¹

In 1940 the United States had begun a phase of active involvement in the West Indies when it agreed to exchange older American destroyers for 99-year leases on British bases in the Caribbean and North Atlantic in the Destroyers for Bases Deal. The United States took control of airfields in the south of Jamaica, and central Trinidad. In addition, it established naval stations on the south coast of Jamaica and in northwest Trinidad. The United States's presence would have lasting effects on Trinidad in particular. The Americans hired locals to work on the bases and on new construction projects at the highest wages ever seen on the island, as high as \$1.20 per day. In nine months the Americans employed 25,000 Trinidadians. In addition, the Americans brought new products, new ideas, and new lifestyle patterns to Trinidad. Locals began to emulate the American styles. The Americans brought something else as well – the image of white men doing manual labor. To many Trinidadians it was a shocking picture that caused them to rethink the inherent superiority of whites they had assumed from their experience with the British.⁶²

United States involvement in the region led to the establishment of the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission in 1942. The organization was established “for the purpose of encouraging and strengthening social and economic co-operation between the United States of America and its possessions and bases in the area . . . and the United Kingdom and British colonies in the same area, and to avoid unnecessary duplication of

⁶¹Colonial Office, *Development and Welfare, 1943-1944*, 93-95; Wallace, *The British Caribbean*, 48-52.

⁶²Colonial Office, *British Dependencies*, 5; Munasinghe, *Callaloo*, 205; Harvey R. Neptune, *Caliban and the Yankees: Trinidad and the United States Occupation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 83-85, 111.

research in these fields.”⁶³ The organization was to focus on economic problems, including labor, agriculture, health, education, social welfare, and finance. The Commission was to advise and consult on these issues with individual governments but not to administer projects. It would assist local governments by collecting and evaluating data and recommending actions. Each government would decide to act on the suggestions or not. In 1946 France and the Netherlands, countries that also had colonies in the Caribbean, joined and the organization was renamed the Caribbean Commission. One subcommittee of the Commission was a West Indian Conference. The Conference was established to provide a regular means of communication and consultation among the delegates from the islands. Two delegates from each island attended its biennial meetings. This was one of the first bodies established in which island representatives met and co-operated.⁶⁴

Constitutionally the islands moved forward as well. In 1944 Barbados amended the Representation of the People Act to lower voting restrictions. Income qualifications dropped from \$50 to \$20 per year and women got the vote. The changes allowed a majority of agricultural workers to vote. In the 1944 general elections, three parties participated. Adams’s Progressive League represented conservative blacks. Although critical of both left and right, it promised labor reforms, social welfare policies, and a gradualist approach to achieving democracy. The newly formed West Indian National Congress Party represented the more militant section of the electorate, the radical elements of the working class. It supported the idea of a socialist government. The planter elite had established the Electors’ Association to represent their interests; their

⁶³Colonial Office, *British Dependencies*, 73.

⁶⁴Colonial Office, *British Dependencies*, 73-75; Williams, *Inward Hunger*, 81.

goal was to hold on to political power. The Congress Party won eight seats in the Assembly; the League won seven; and the Electors' Association won eight. The House of Assembly elected in 1944 included a majority of trade unionists. Members elected Grantley Adams leader of the House.⁶⁵ Although the elections represented a step forward for Barbados, the colonial governor still retained responsibility for the administration of the island and the execution of the laws passed by the Assembly.

In 1944 Jamaica got a new Constitution that replaced that of 1884. Among its provisions was the establishment of a House of Representatives with thirty-two members elected by universal adult suffrage. The House elected a speaker from among its own members. An upper house, the Legislative Council, consisted of three ex-officio members, two official and not less than ten unofficial members. It too elected its own presiding officer, although the colonial governor still headed the government. The new system allowed a wider spectrum of the population to participate. In the first general election in December 1944, the JLP got 41.4 per cent of the vote, while the PNP tallied 23.5 per cent. The JLP won twenty-three seats in the new House; the PNP gained five; four independent candidates were elected as well. Of the 663,069 eligible voters in 1944, 389,109 took part in the election. Once again, although Jamaicans benefited from more participation in their government, the colonial government still exercised final authority. Norman Manley criticized the new Constitution for just that reason. He said it did not bring responsible government to Jamaica, because ministers reported on department

⁶⁵Great Britain, British Information Services, *Towards Self-Government in the British Colonies* (New York: British Information Services, 1950), 20; Colonial Office, *Barbados, 1947*, 5; Colonial Office, *British Dependencies*, 9; Beckles, *History of Barbados*, 178-181.

activities but were not responsible for the actions taken by the department. He insisted that Jamaicans must take charge of their own country if progress was to occur.⁶⁶

In Trinidad in 1940 the governor changed the make-up of the Legislative Council to make it more representative. He increased the number of elected members from seven to nine, plus six nominated and three official members. In 1945 Trinidad adopted universal adult suffrage, reduced the qualifications for elected members of the legislature, and made women eligible for election to the Legislative Council. Residents with property valued at \$5,000 or an income of \$480 per year could vote now. In the 1946 elections, the electorate grew from 25,822 in 1933 to 259,512.⁶⁷

These were impressive political changes. More residents of Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad could now vote. Jamaica received a new Constitution. In Barbados and Jamaica the newly-formed political parties elected candidates. Although a British governor remained in charge of every island, local political input had increased in the West Indies.

In 1945 the British government released the complete report of the Moyne Commission. It was an indictment of the Crown Colony system which had denied opportunities to lower-class blacks and kept them at the bottom of the social ladder. The Commission urged Britain to take the demands for change seriously. Members called the upheavals of the late 1930s “no longer a mere blind protest against a worsening of conditions, but a positive demand for the creation of new conditions that will render a

⁶⁶British Information Services, *Towards Self-Government*, 18-19; Colonial Office, *British Dependencies*, 12; Bell, *Jamaican Leaders*, 18; Clinton V. Black, *History of Jamaica* (London: Collins Clear-Type Press, 1961), 232-234; Nettleford, *Norman Manley*, 121-122; Sherlock and Bennett, *Jamaican People*, 371-373; Hurwitz and Hurwitz, *Jamaica*, 205.

⁶⁷For results of the 1946 elections in Trinidad see Chapter 4. Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Annual Report on Trinidad and Tobago, B.W.I., 1947* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1949), 94; Colonial Office, *British Dependencies*, 14; British Information Services, *Towards Self-Government*, 20-21.

better and less restricted life.”⁶⁸ The report concluded that the basic problem for the West Indies was the demand for better living conditions from an expanding populace. According to the findings of the survey, every island had experienced significant population growth in the 1930s, in large part due to the return of émigrés. The economic depression of the same decade exacerbated the problem because it forced some businesses to close, so even more workers lost jobs. The economy of the islands had never allowed workers to save money, which might have helped them cope with the situation. Social services were also inadequate, partially as a result of defects in British policy and partially because Colonial governments did not have the money necessary to create programs on their own.⁶⁹

The Moyne Commission report made it clear that lack of education and inappropriate education contributed to the social problems. Most importantly it asserted that the islands needed curricula more closely related to the life and experience of the islanders. The Moyne Commission recommended giving subjects a West Indian background where possible, rather than an English one. It also proposed that West Indian history and geography be taught in the schools and that the Junior Cambridge examination be abolished. The report concluded that adult education be introduced on the islands, although it described the undertaking as massive due to the large number of islanders who had little or no regular schooling. As part of the project, it recommended that reading material be supplied to the adult public, which it believed abandoned reading soon after leaving school.⁷⁰

⁶⁸Colonial Office, *West India Royal Commission Report*, 4-5.

⁶⁹Colonial Office, *West India Royal Commission Report*, 9, 92-105, 423.

⁷⁰Colonial Office, *West India Royal Commission Report*, 125-127, 423.

In a related report, the West Indies Committee of the Commission on Higher Education in the Colonies concluded that the history, racial composition, and geographical dispersion of the West Indies had hindered the development of higher education there. The British had considered providing higher education in the past but had always decided against it.⁷¹ In 1942, twelve hundred students from the islands qualified to proceed to higher education. In that year, one hundred nine West Indians were studying in British universities and two hundred fifty were in North America, including schools in the United States and Canada.⁷² Because so many students who qualified did not win scholarships and could not afford to go overseas at their own expense, the Commission recommended the establishment of a single, centralized, University of the West Indies. The University of the West Indies opened in⁷³

The West Indies Committee based its decision about higher education on several considerations. One was the need for responsible, well-informed leaders in the region. The report pointed to the recent changes in the West Indies, including the development of unions and political parties, both of which would benefit from informed leadership. Colonial political advances meant that more people became eligible to vote. Many of them were illiterate. The literacy rate in Jamaica in 1944 was sixty per cent; it was lower on the small islands. The Committee agreed that educated leaders as role models and local opportunities for higher education might generate an interest in education at all levels of society. The report also pointed out that access to local education might mean

⁷¹In 1926, 1930, and 1938 the British rejected the idea because of the geographical problems associated with the endeavor. See Colonial Office, *Committee on Higher Education Report*, 10.

⁷²Students without financial support traveled to the United States to pursue educational opportunities because they could work their way through college there, but the only profession the British government would allow them to enter if they moved back home was dentistry. The British preferred to train their own government workers and teachers. Ivaar Oxaal, *Black Intellectuals Come to Power: The Rise of Creole Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing, 1968), 62.

⁷³Colonial Office, *Committee on Higher Education Report*, 10-11.

that more women could take advantage of the opportunity. The Committee believed that the West Indies would benefit from the introduction of more women into the decision-making process of the islands. The Committee concluded that a university would make a positive contribution to the education, social and political development, and ultimately, the prosperity of the West Indies.⁷⁴

In terms of political development, the Commission reported that there was widespread interest in the West Indies in some form of federation of the islands into a single political unit, although ideas on what it would look like varied widely. Most envisioned federation as a step toward more autonomy, including more power to the elected legislatures. The report pointed out that there was more diversity in the views of islanders on federation than concurrence on what a federation would do. In addition, proposals for unification of services in the West Indies had failed because the larger, richer islands were unwilling to participate.⁷⁵

In order to improve economic conditions on the islands, the report recommended that the islands begin producing more crops designed to feed the local population and less for export. Islanders could not afford the rising costs of imported food, but the islands were capable of supplying their own needs, according to the Commission. It was not just the big planters who were at fault. The peasant farmer concentrated on growing for export as well. The Commission concluded that, "So deeply entrenched in West Indian agricultural practice is production for export, and consequent concentration on a single crop, even among peasant proprietors, that the necessary development towards food

⁷⁴Colonial Office, *Committee on Higher Education Report*, 16-17, 50.

⁷⁵Colonial Office, *West India Royal Commission Report*, 326-327, 424-425, 447-448.

production on the basis of mixed farming constitutes practically an agricultural revolution.”⁷⁶

The Moyne Commission acknowledged that improving economic and labor conditions on the islands would be difficult because of existing attitudes. Its report described “a prevailing absence of a spirit of independence and self-help, the lack of a tradition of craftsmanship and pride in good work, and a tendency on all matters to appeal to Government for assistance with little or no attempt to explore what can be done by individual self-help.”⁷⁷ The Commission realized that some people in the West Indies did not fall into this category but lamented that the majority did. The Commissioners acknowledged that the history of the islands, particularly the British tendency to leave West Indians out of the decision-making process, was in large part responsible for this attitude but argued that no effort to improve conditions on the islands would be successful without a change in this attitude.⁷⁸

Conclusion

World War I, the depression of the 1930s, and World War II had produced a new group of middle class leaders with direct connections to the working class. In response to the economic effects of the depression, these leaders generated mass protests. It was the members of the working class who had congregated in the cities who responded to the activism of the new leaders. Many urban residents were unemployed or under-employed at low wages and saw an opportunity to improve their lives. The British had never experienced this level of response from the islands to their rule in the past. The British responded with commissions to study the problems and to recommend changes, and,

⁷⁶Colonial Office, *West India Royal Commission Report*, 427.

⁷⁷Colonial Office, *West India Royal Commission Report*, 35.

⁷⁸Colonial Office, *West India Royal Commission Report*, 35-36.

finally, with the beginnings of political reform. The extension of the franchise resulted in the election of some of the labor leaders or their supporters to office. Yet in 1945 candidates still had to meet income or property requirements to run. Even when those requirements were lowered, usually middle-class blacks were the ones elected because they were the ones who had the financial resources and time available to run for office. Although some of them had a sincere desire to help the working class, many saw a chance to advance their own careers under the British. As a result they often accepted conservative change in cooperation with the British Governor. For example in Jamaica in the 1930s both Bustamante's JLP and Manley's PNP, although describing themselves very differently, had similar goals of improving life for the working man and achieving some measure of self-government, but with the British still in charge.

As West Indian political leaders asserted their power, another group saw an opportunity to encourage the growth of a native culture that might draw attention to the reality of life on the islands. By the 1930s, men and women on several islands shifted their attention to promoting native cultural arts, a topic we will explore in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER III
WEST INDIANS BEGIN TO WRITE ABOUT THEIR SOCIETY
CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE 1930S

“Living in tenement yards”¹

In the 1930s a true West Indian cultural movement began. Writers created a new social, cultural and literary awareness in the West Indies that would eventually lead to the rise of West Indies Literature in the 1950s. Some would also attempt to politicize West Indians. In this chapter we will look at the first authors to focus on the lives of West Indians. They began writing for literary magazines that were also new to the region. Later all of them would leave their islands to get their work published because there were no publishing companies operating on the islands. These authors are important because they were the first to write novels from the perspective of the lower class, black, and colored or mixed race islanders. Within twenty years West Indian writers would explode on the international literary scene writing from a similar perspective. The men we meet in this chapter led the way.

West Indian intellectuals used the same experiences of the World War I years that had inspired political protest to begin a consideration of the status of native West Indians on their own islands. The original group of novelists came from Trinidad and Jamaica, the two islands that had the most active labor unions. One, Alfred Mendes of Trinidad,

¹A.J. Seymour, “Tomorrow Belongs to the People,” in Reinhard Sander, “The Thirties and Forties,” in Bruce King, ed., *West Indian Literature* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1979), 48.

fought in World War I, saw discrimination against black West Indians first hand, and became aware of some of the new socialist ideas developing in Europe. Others, like the Trinidadian C.L.R. James, became interested in the new political movements that emerged on the islands after the war. Ralph de Boissiere, also from Trinidad, was actively involved in the trade union movement. His reputation as a radical made it difficult for him to find work, so he left Trinidad. He wrote his only West Indian novels in the 1940s before he left the islands. Claude McKay, who was a successful poet in Jamaica, had no organized literary support system and left the island in 1912 before the post-World War I movement for political reform began; he too left because there was more opportunity to get his work published in the United States. Most of these men who began the new literary trends, though, were not interested in promoting political activism. Their goal was to develop an independent West Indian literature, removed from the British tradition. They wrote about the lives of lower-class inhabitants of the islands because they realized that the middle class was concerned so much with pleasing the British in order to succeed that they did not take time to consider the circumstances of those worse off than they were. Only Ralph De Boissiere used his experience within the union movement to add a political element to his work.²

Trinidad

The real beginning of the magazine movement came in Trinidad in the late 1920s. C.L.R. James, a middle-class black, and Alfred Mendes, a white Creole of Portuguese descent, founded *Trinidad* in 1929. Their purpose was to introduce West Indians to a new type of literature that focused on the majority population rather than the British and

²James would become a well-known international and West Indian political activist after he left Trinidad; he wrote *Minty Alley* while he still lived on the island.

their way of life. James and Mendes hoped that West Indians would abandon their dependence on Britain in cultural matters. Mendes demonstrated the difficulty the founders faced when he pointed out that they came from middle-class families that benefited from British rule, yet they were trying to create a national literature for Trinidad. Although the journal appeared only twice (1929 and 1930), it signaled a new era in West Indian writing. The 1929 issue included short stories by Mendes, James, de Boissiere, and several others, plus an article on current piano and violin music popular on the island titled “Pianists and Violinists on the Gramophone.” The 1930 issue added poetry and reviews of several books, including *Banjo* by Claude McKay, *A High Wind in Jamaica* by Richard Hughes, and Ernest Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*. According to later critics, most of the stories were not of high standard.³

One short story in the 1929 issue of *Trinidad* that received critical acclaim was “Triumph,” by C.L.R. James. It presents a vivid picture of life in a barrack-yard, the slum dwellings found in every large city on any British Caribbean island. James describes a typical yard: “a narrow gateway leading into a fairly big yard, on either side of which run long, low buildings, consisting of anything from four to eighteen rooms, each about twelve feet square. In these lived the porters, the prostitutes, carter-men, washerwomen and domestic servants of the city.”⁴

James’s story is about a rivalry between two women who live in the yard. He describes Mamitz as a woman down on her luck, “so depressed was the woman and so

³Amon Saba Saakana, *The Colonial Legacy in Caribbean Literature* (London: Darnak House, 1987), 72-73; Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and Its Background* (London: Heinemann, 1983), 64.

⁴C.L. R. James, “Triumph,” in Anna Grimshaw, ed., *The C.L.R. James Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 29.

depressing her surroundings.”⁵ The tram conductor who keeps her has accused Mamitz of infidelity and beaten her. What depresses her, though, is that after a second beating, he leaves her. She is forced into prostitution to survive. When she gets back on her feet again, which means she finds another man to support her, or in her case two men, Irene, another resident of the yard, gets jealous and tries to destroy Mamitz’s relationships by telling one man about the other. Mamitz manages to salvage her life and even enjoyed some prosperity and the novel ends with the women of the barrack-yard taunting Irene, who has no response.⁶

James’s story was typical of the barrack-yard stories that appeared in *Trinidad*. It was a picture of a society he thought the white middle and upper class never saw; he knew the yard inhabitants existed outside the developing workers movement. They were educated under a British system that taught them British attitudes and values and convinced them that to get ahead they must be as British-like as possible. Any association with the lower class only hindered their chances of getting ahead. “Triumph” presented a raw look at the poor, living life in the open with no privacy; it relied on sex and violence to bring reality to the picture. James made no social or moral comment on the situation. He merely presented life as it existed. He even played down the violence that was part of life in the yard. The women’s triumph was over each other, not the economic system that shaped their lives.⁷

Mendes and James, along with Albert Gomes, a Trinidadian of Portuguese descent, went on to found the Beacon Group, a literary society that met to read and

⁵James, “Triumph,” 30.

⁶James, “Triumph,” 40.

⁷Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel*, 65-66; Anthony Bogus, *Caliban’s Freedom: The Early Political Thought of C.L.R. James* (London: Chicago Pluto Press, 1997), 17-18.

discuss the work of its members, nationalist in political outlook by focusing on the West Indies, and realistic in their approach to social problems. The members of the Beacon Group were diverse. They came mostly from the middle class but from different races. Outside of their literary meetings, the group members were not invited to the same social events. James described his relationship with Mendes in a 1972 interview. “We were as close as possible considering he was a white man and I was a colored man. We didn’t meet in a social way, but I was always at his place, his study; he was regularly at mine. We exchanged books and talked two or three times a week. That was the relationship; it couldn’t have been closer.”⁸

The Beacon Group produced the first wave of West Indian self-awareness through *The Beacon*, a monthly magazine published from 1931 to 1933. One of the goals of the group was to achieve a cultural definition of the West Indies that was not British. The magazine published articles on politics, race, and music; reviews of books; critiques of music recitals and art exhibitions; and letters and editorials. *The Beacon* editors insisted that West Indian writers use local settings, speech, characters, and situations. Contributors, who were local, mostly male intellectuals, focused mainly on the working and poor classes. They gave a voice to the people, whom they tended to romanticize in their fiction. *The Beacon* was more than a literary magazine, though. Its editorials took up political issues, denouncing Crown Colony government and praising what editorials described as the socialist experiment in Russia. These political pieces detailed conditions for a social class to which most of these writers did not belong. *The Beacon* was popular throughout the West Indies, selling more than 5,000 copies at the peak of its popularity.

⁸Ian Munro and Reinhard Sander, eds., *Kas-Kas: Interviews with Three Caribbean Writers in Texas*, George Lamming, C.L.R. James, Wilson Harris (Austin: University of Texas at Austin, 1972), 33.

It was not a commercial success, though. Gomes, who provided financing for the magazine, regularly borrowed money from his family to publish the next issue.⁹

Mendes described *The Beacon* as a mixture of intelligence, wit and satire, all designed to criticize the white elite. For example, in an editorial published in 1933, he addressed the existence of literary clubs in Trinidad. He criticized their members for discussing only British literature and ignoring local writers. *The Beacon* stressed the importance of moving away from the English tradition of writing that ignored the West Indies.¹⁰

Not surprisingly, most of the white Trinidadian middle class was hostile to the journal. When the magazine printed a story about a white woman who was seduced by an East Indian man, a letter to the local newspaper argued that the story was in very bad taste. The editor of *The Beacon* responded by pointing out that the article described an event that happened regularly in Trinidad. The magazine also supported a number of causes that were unpopular with the ruling elite, like the creation of trade unions and the establishment of unemployment insurance. Several editorials attacked the Trinidad oil industry for discriminatory hiring policies that kept local people out of white collar jobs.¹¹ According to Albert Gomes,

In its chequered two years of existence “The Beacon” was involved in a libel action, frequent visits from the police, denunciation from the pulpit, pressure from both church

⁹Sander, “The Thirties and Forties,” 49-50; Saakana, *Colonial Legacy*, 72; Nicole King, *C.L.R. James and Creolization: Circles of Influence* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 32, 55; Reinhard W. Sander, *The Trinidad Awakening: West Indian Literature of the Nineteen-Thirties* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 29.

¹⁰Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel*, 64; Sander, “The Thirties and Forties,” 49; King, *C.L.R. James and Creolization*, 33; Saakana, *Colonial Legacy*, 72-74.

¹¹Sander, *Trinidad Awakening*, 32-36.

and state, increasing opposition from the commercial community, and chronic lack of funds.¹²

Some of the authors who contributed to *The Beacon* were also the first to publish novels about lower-class West Indians in the 1930s. Mendes and James, who gained fame writing for *The Beacon*, were among the first West Indian authors to publish novels that focused attention on the Caribbean and its problems. Both left Trinidad to write their novels, Mendes for the United States and James for Britain. None of their books were published by West Indian publishers, which were still rare. They continued to write barrack-yard stories. In what might be described as descriptive novels, presenting the problems, customs and beliefs of lower-class blacks, James and Mendes rarely challenged the existing situation in the West Indies in a direct way. James would take a more critical view of West Indian politics after he left Trinidad.¹³

A look at Mendes's work confirms that there was no attempt on his part to deal with the problems of the British rulers. Mendes, the son of a wealthy Trinidad merchant of Portuguese descent, was educated in England from age eight. During World War I he served in France. When he returned to Trinidad in 1920, he viewed the island as a casualty of British imperialism, handed down by the local middle class of which he was a part. Mendes never became a political revolutionary. Instead, he attacked the social and cultural values of the colonial middle class through his writing.¹⁴

¹²Albert Gomes, "Through A Maze of Colour," in Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh, eds., *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature* (London: Routledge, 1996), 168-169.

¹³Jon Knippers Black, Howard S. Blutstein, Kathryn Therese Johnston, and David S. McMorris *Area Handbook for Trinidad and Tobago* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976), 161-162; Bruce King, "Introduction," in Bruce King, ed., *West Indian Literature* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1979), 2; Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel*, 67-68.

¹⁴Sander, *Trinidad Awakening*, 71-72; Reinhard W. Sander, "Alfred H. Mendes," in Daryl Cumber Dance, ed., *Fifty Caribbean Writers: A Biobibliographical Critical Sourcebook* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 318-320.

Mendes used social realism to portray the misery stemming from poverty and racism in the novel *Pitch Lake* (1934), the story of a second-generation Portuguese resident of Port of Spain, Trinidad's capital.¹⁵ The protagonist is Joe da Costa, torn between becoming a shopkeeper like his father or joining Portuguese middle-class society with the hope of getting a government job. From da Costa's perspective, this means little real choice. To follow in his father's footsteps would have consigned him to a lower-class existence for the rest of his life. In the novel, the Portuguese are portrayed as inferior to other Europeans even though they are white because most came to the island as indentured servants. As shopkeepers they sell to East Indians and blacks, because whites choose not to do business with them. Joe decides that to be accepted by the Portuguese elite he must cut ties with the lower class people among whom he had lived and worked. Seeking social advancement, he ends his relationship with Marie, a colored girl from the barrack yard. As he transforms himself, he begins to look down on those he has known. "It hurt him to think that he had wasted so many years of his life in selling rum and cigarettes to common niggers and coolies who were not fit even to tie his shoe-laces."¹⁶

Joe moves in with his brother Henry, who married into a Portuguese family of good social standing. He explains to Joe the complications of class, color, race, and nationality that he must deal with daily.

As you probably know, under the existing rules you can only be a member [of the Portuguese Club] if you are of Portuguese descent. The Portuguese community here from which we can draw members is small. . . . The colour question, you know, difficult, very difficult. Of course, there's the St. Clair Club, but that's a different proposition.

¹⁵ Alfred H. Mendes, *Pitch Lake* (London: Duckworth, 1934).

¹⁶ Mendes, *Pitch Lake*, 14.

More English than anything else and people here respect the English more than they respect any other nationality.¹⁷

Joe begins to date Cora, a wealthy young Portuguese creole. He is never comfortable with Cora, though. “He was on tenterhooks of shyness trying his best to appear at home in Cora’s presence . . . try as he might, he could not bring himself to be easy with her.”¹⁸ At the same time he dates Cora, he begins an affair with Stella, his brother’s Indian maid, with whom he is much more comfortable. In the final chapter, in fear that his relationship will cause a scandal that will cost him his social position, Joe goes crazy and murders Stella, who is carrying his child. He blames her for his failures, believing that she has brought him down to her level, not allowing him to succeed in society. Joe thinks, “If Stella had not been taken on as a maid he would never have come to his present pass.”¹⁹

Mendes’s book was a continuation of attacks on the middle class that he started with his articles in *The Beacon*. In this case he focused on the middle class that he knew best, the Portuguese. He presented Joe’s brother Henry, who had entered their urban world, as passive. The members of the middle-class society that he wanted to enter did not understand Joe and did not care to get to know him. They were interested in pleasing the British. They had no interest in those beneath them socially. This was the most common complaint against the mixed-race, middle class on the islands: that they had no concern about those beneath them because they were trying to impress the British in order to get ahead under British rule. Mendes portrayed Joe as a figure he knew well – trapped in the middle class. He himself could not join the British upper class because he

¹⁷Mendes, *Pitch Lake*, 130.

¹⁸Mendes, *Pitch Lake*, 108.

¹⁹Mendes, *Pitch Lake*, 130, 161, 320.

was not British. Associating with the lower classes only diminished his status. The British controlled the island, and employment or social opportunities for anyone else were rare. In order to accomplish anything many islanders believed that cooperation with the British was essential. As already noted, in the 1930s and 40s both Alexander Bustamante and Norman Manley of Jamaica, as well as Grantley Adams of Barbados chose to work with the British to achieve change.

In his second book, *Black Fauns* (1935), Mendes's story was secondary to his authentic depiction of black life in a Trinidad barrack-yard. He presented the barrack-yard as a community, where the reader could hear discussions of religion, sex, and politics and could see the inhabitants celebrating happy occasions and intriguing against each other. Excitement in the yard reaches a peak when Snakey, the son of Ma Christine, returns from a visit to America. Ma Christine is the matriarch of the yard. The younger women look up to her partly because of her air of respectability; she was once the wife of a primary school teacher. Miriam and Ethelrida embody Mendes's stance on political issues. Their arguments allow Mendes to present a wide range of views on a multitude of issues. Miriam, the only inhabitant who can read and write, believes that "white people more smart than nigger people."²⁰ Ethelrida dismisses the idea. "If you leave your own land . . . to come back wit' de news dat white people more smart than nigger people. It was more better you was never born."²¹ The two women also argue about local politics. Miriam believes that the local government and the new political leaders are committed to making life in Trinidad better for everyone. "Look the Red House, where the Governor does sit with his council. It have nigger there, yes; but who does stand up for your rights?"

²⁰Alfred H. Mendes, *Black Fauns* (London: Duckworth, 1935), 241.

²¹Mendes, *Black Fauns*, 242.

You call Capting Cupriani a black man when all the time he white like water? The negro in the Council afraid their own shadow, my child!”²² Ethelrida, on the other hand, sees the reformist measures of Captain Cipriani as a joke. She believes that the people need black politicians to fight on behalf of the black working class.²³

Mendes’s views of the influence of elected officials accurately depicted the political situation that existed in Trinidad in the 1930s. The British created very few new positions. Newly elected members of government like Cipriani generally worked in conjunction with the British and white elected officials. Eric Williams called the Legislative Council in place in Trinidad in 1929 “nothing more than a debating society” because it contained a minority of elected members. The British expected representatives to offer opinions but to lodge no formal opposition against the government.²⁴

The other story that Mendes presents in *Black Fauns* is about two women, Mamitz (a common name in the barrack-yard and no relation to James’s character of the same name) and Martha, vying for Snakey’s attentions. Mamitz, a mulatto, manages to entice Snakey away from Martha, a quiet and withdrawn girl who displays periodic episodes of violence. In fact, Snakey uses the women, carrying on a relationship with both, taking Martha’s money to support Mamitz. When Martha finds out, she launches a violent attack on Mamitz, which causes the whole barrack-yard to erupt in violence. Snakey leaves the yard. The novel ends with the announcement of Mamitz’s death. The

²²Mendes, *Black Fauns*, 13-14.

²³Mendes, *Black Fauns*, 13-14.

²⁴Eric Williams, *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago* (New York: Praeger, [1962] 1964), 221.

reader is left wondering what happened to Martha. From a neighboring yard an observer comments “Eh-eh . . . it looks like as if God vext with this yard in truth.”²⁵

Again, there was no direct challenge to change the conditions in the yards in *Black Fauns*. Mendes described a society, a class of people, that middle- and upper-class West Indians did not even know existed. His portrait of the yard conveyed a sense of community; the inhabitants lived in such close proximity that they had a sense of shared identity. Although they fought regularly, they also shared each other’s joys and sorrows. Future authors, particularly Roger Mais, would present a very similar picture. In addition to bringing a whole class of people to the attention of the public, Mendes’s novels about life in the barrack-yard provided examples of some of the problems that political activists had to address. The yard population was poor, with little if any education; they had no access to health care, and they had no hope for positive change in the near future.

Although he wrote in the new West Indian tradition of focusing on lower-class life that began with the literary magazines, Mendes’s novels never had a contemporary audience in the Caribbean. There was no publishing company in his native Trinidad in the 1930s, nor was there a large reading public interested in his works. The middle class who could have read them were already familiar with Mendes from his days with the Beacon Group and were not interested in his subject matter. They continued to read British authors.²⁶

James, whom scholars consider one of the greatest writers and critics ever produced in the Caribbean region, was a Marxist in later life and always strongly committed to a socialist philosophy and the Pan-African movement. Although later his

²⁵Mendes, *Black Fauns*, 326; Sander, “The Thirties and Forties,” 53-54.

²⁶Aldon Lynn Nielsen, *C.L.R. James: A Critical Introduction* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 23, 28.

creative writing would reflect his radical political philosophy, there was little evidence of this attitude in his early writings. He acknowledged that he was not involved in politics in the 1930s but stated that he was sympathetic to attempts to gain more political rights for lower- and middle-class islanders.²⁷ According to James, “when I got up to speak everybody knew that I was supporting Cipriani . . . I would say that man Cipriani, he is the man who has our future.”²⁸

James was born in 1901 into a black, middle-class family. He received a scholarship to Queen’s Royal College in Trinidad, where he later taught. James described the curriculum in *Beyond a Boundary*. “I studied Latin with Virgil, Caesar and Horace, and wrote Latin verses. I studied Greek with Euripides and Thucydides. I did elementary and applied mathematics, French and French literature, English and English literature, English history, ancient and modern history.”²⁹ In the 1930s he went to England where he became politically active in socialist and then Marxist movements. In 1938 he moved to the United States from which he was expelled in 1953 for his Communist views. In 1958 he joined Eric Williams in the People’s National Movement (PNM), but basic political differences between the two caused James to leave Trinidad for England in 1962, just before Trinidad achieved independence. In general James believed that Williams was not radical enough in his political beliefs. The men also

²⁷Munro and Sander, *Kas-Kas*, 33.

²⁸Paul Buhle, “The Making of a Literary Life: C.L.R. James Interviewed,” in Paget Henry and Paul Buhle, eds., *C.L.R. James’s Caribbean* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996): 60; James wrote a biography of Cipriani, *The Life of Captain Cipriani: An Account of British Government in the West Indies* (Nelson, England: Coulton, 1932). He also wrote two other political studies of the West Indies, *The Case for West-Indian Self-Government* (London: Hogarth Press, 1933) and *Party Politics in the West Indies* (San Juan, Trinidad: Vedic, 1962). In addition he wrote books on other topics, including *World Revolution 1917-1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1937), *Marines, Renegades and Castaways: The Study of Melville and the World We Live In* (New York: Author, 1953), *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill, 1977); and *Wilson Harris: A Philosophical Approach* (St. Augustine, Trinidad: Busby’s Printerie, 1965).

²⁹C.L. R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (London: Hutchinson, 1963), 37.

disagreed on how best to achieve political change. James believed that true political change came from below. Williams believed that those in control effected change. Specifically James supported the idea of a West Indies Federation as the surest method of bringing independence to the island and allowing the people of the West Indies to determine their own future. Williams believed the Federation would take too much control out of local hands and believed that significant change would come to Trinidad only through independent, black leadership supported by the majority black population of the island. James returned to Trinidad in 1965 as a cricket correspondent but was put under house arrest, for no clear reason, by the Williams government; he was released as a result of the public outcry and because Williams lifted the existing state of emergency forcing him to release those being held with no charges filed against them.³⁰

James's only West Indian novel, *Minty Alley* (1936), made a clear distinction between an educated black and an uneducated black, a technique James used to describe the alienation of the educated class of West Indians from the masses. By doing so, he addressed a problem that both he and Mendes acknowledged: the social gap that existed between them and the people they wrote about. He used the vernacular Trinidadian speech, the language of the majority of the citizens, to emphasize the distance that separated them from the middle class, who tried to be as much like the British as possible. It was a distance that middle-class West Indian blacks worked to achieve

³⁰Daryl Cumber Dance, *New World Adams: Conversations with Contemporary West Indian Writers* (Leeds, Yorkshire: Pupal Tree Books, [1984] 1992), 110; King, *C.L.R. James and Creolization*, 56-75; Black, *Trinidad*, 161-162; Sander, "The Thirties and Forties," in King, ed., *West Indian Literature*, 54-55; Eugenia Collier, "C.L.R. James," in Daryl Cumber Dance, ed., *Fifty Caribbean Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 229-232; Caryl Phillips, "C.L.R. James: The Most Noteworthy Caribbean Mind of the Twentieth Century," *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 33 (Autumn 2001): 199; Ivar Oxaal, *Black Intellectual Come to Power: The Rise of Creole Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago* (London: Schenkman, 1968), 74-75. For details of Williams's views of the West Indies Federation, see Chapter 4.

through education and their choice of career path. James acknowledged, though, that he originally wrote the novel just to amuse himself one summer. He was describing a piece of his own life when he spent some time living in rooms at the front of a barrack-yard. He moved there not because of a financial setback, but because he wanted some independence from his family and it was all he could afford. He wrote about it because the people fascinated him and he wanted to portray them “from the point of view of an educated youthful member of the black middle class.”³¹

In *Minty Alley*, James introduces a middle-class black character, Haynes, who, because of a financial setback, has to move into a barrack-yard, No. 2 Minty Alley. Haynes lives in the front house at No. 2, which is small but respectable; the yard ranges out behind the house. All of his life he has been dependent upon his mother, a schoolmistress, and their servant, Ella. Haynes’s mother wants him to receive professional training in England to prepare him for an independent existence in colonial society. She told him, “You are a black man . . . and in these islands for a black man to be independent means that he must have money or a profession.”³² Yet his mother dies before she can prepare Haynes for his future. When he gets into financial trouble Ella finds him a home at Minty Alley, which is located off Victoria Street, a major thoroughfare in Port of Spain. His family home is just two hundred yards from Minty Alley, but he has no idea the street exists. When he moves in Ella reminds him that the inhabitants of Minty Alley are “ordinary people, sir. Not your class of people.”³³

³¹Munro and Sander, *Kas-Kas*, 33. James wrote the novel in 1929 but it was not published until he went to England. King, “Introduction,” 2; Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel*, 69-70.

³²C.L.R. James, *Minty Alley* (London: Secher and Warburg, 1936), 22.

³³James, *Minty Alley*, 21.

It is Haynes's view of the barrack-yard, which wavers between fascination and disgust, that the reader is offered. He uses a peephole in his room to spy on the other residents. He sees himself as outside of the daily routine of the barrack-yard and, indeed, he does work as a clerk in a bookstore, but he remains fascinated by what goes on. Maisie, his friend and lover, informs Haynes about barrack-yard life and interprets it for him. "Through her Haynes knew immediately every single thing that was going on in the house."³⁴ Maisie also becomes his teacher, showing him how to cope with life, even outside the yard. When he is hesitant to ask his boss for a raise, Maisie insists that it is his due and encourages him to demand the pay increase, which he does. Haynes becomes more self-confident at her urging. To the people of the yard, Haynes is the expert, the one people turn to for advice because he is the only educated man they know. Life in Minty Alley exists independent of the outside world. Only the day to day life of the yard matters. At the end of the novel the people of Minty Alley break up when the yard is sold to make room for a modern building. Maisie goes to the United States, because she knows that Haynes can never rebel against his middle-class standards enough to marry her. Haynes finds new lodging outside the slums and gradually loses track of the people. "Whenever Haynes passed there in the tramcar he used to make it a point of duty to look. But of late he forgot more often than not."³⁵

Haynes represented the distance James wanted to illustrate between middle class and poor society. Even a man like Haynes, who lived among the people of the yard, never tried to keep in touch with them once he left. He could never really be a part of their life, preferring to spy on them through his peephole. He had every opportunity to

³⁴James, *Minty Alley*, 209.

³⁵James, *Minty Alley*, 172, 243-244.

get to know the people but never took advantage. Even his friend Maisie called him “Mr. Haynes.” James’s barrack-yard also told a secondary tale of poverty, lack of education and health care, and little hope for the future, the same issues that concerned political activists in the 1930s.³⁶

James described the importance of his writing in this period. “‘Triumph’ and *Minty Alley* represent my concern with ordinary people, quite ordinary people who were not members of any union, were not politically advanced, but there they were.”³⁷ He went on to say that he knew instinctively that these people really mattered. James said that his father, a black middle-class man, had kept him away from this type of people but when he learned of them they fascinated him. *Minty Alley* was based on actual people whom he developed. He wrote the novel in 1929, but it was not published until he went to England. Although he said it got good critical reviews, “nobody was interested in the life of the West Indian people in those days in Europe. Some people said it was a very strange thing, obviously very peculiar people living a fantastic life and that was the end of that.”³⁸ It was not until about 1950, when more West Indian novels were published, that the British and West Indians began talking about the novel.³⁹

Again, neither James nor Mendes made explicit judgments about life in the barrack-yard, a trend that distinguished them from the West Indian authors of the 1950s. The writers of the 1930s played down the squalor of the yard, choosing to focus on the lives lived there. They asked their readers to accept the assumptions they made about the people of the barrack-yard, that they were people who had certain customs and beliefs

³⁶Nielsen, *C.L.R. James*, 28-34; Bogue, *Caliban’s Freedom*, 13; King, “Introduction,” 2; Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel*, 69-70.

³⁷Dance, *New World Adams*, 111.

³⁸Dance, *New World Adams*, 113.

³⁹Dance, *New World Adams*, 110-113.

and problems but no real aspirations. The inhabitants showed no anger at their predicament; they just lived and survived, day by day. James and Mendes meant their work to be a critique of the middle class. They wanted to show middle-class readers a life that existed in their own cities, which they ignored. The educated West Indian was interested in pleasing the British in order to get ahead. It did the middle class no good to care for people beneath their social status; the goal was to escape from that life.

James also wrote *The Black Jacobins* (1938), a history of the revolution in Haiti.⁴⁰ James was the first black West Indian author to use an historical event to make a statement about the ability of blacks to change their society. James wrote his book to call attention to the encounter between the Caribbean and the West, and to provide West Indians and Africans with an example of a successful black revolution in the Caribbean in the early years of their own anti-colonial struggles. Although James stated that he initially wrote the book to inspire African revolution in Africa, when West Indians began their active search for independence after 1945, it influenced them as well. “When the movement towards self government began, a lot of West Indians read *The Black Jacobins* and said it meant a lot to them.”⁴¹ By the late 1930s his Marxist convictions were obvious. According to James, “Writers on the West Indies always relate them to their approximation to Britain, France, Spain and America . . . to Western Civilization, never in relation to their own history.”⁴² James portrays the Haitian revolution as proletarian in character: “The slaves worked on the land, and, like revolutionary peasants everywhere, they aimed at the extermination of their oppressors. But working and living together in

⁴⁰C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, [1938] 1989).

⁴¹Munro and Sander, *Kas-Kas*, 35.

⁴²James, *The Black Jacobins*, xi.

gangs of hundreds on the huge sugar factories . . . they were closer to a modern proletariat than any group of workers in existence at the time, and the rising was, therefore, a thoroughly prepared and organised mass movement.”⁴³ He describes the movement as strong enough to convince free blacks to join.⁴⁴

James credits the Haitian Revolution with establishing Caribbean self-definition through a revolution of the masses. He calls Toussaint L’Ouverture the man who first perceived Haiti, a Caribbean island, as a modern nation. “Toussaint alone among the black leaders, was . . . organising out of the thousands of ignorant and untrained blacks an army capable of fighting European troops. The insurgents had developed a method of attack based on their overwhelming numerical superiority.”⁴⁵

James wants to show blacks that they can transform their societies and define their own cultures, that they can be self-sufficient. Throughout the book, he interjects comments that make his point. He decries the lack of leadership in Africa and the West Indies when he says, “It is the tragedy of mass movements that they need and can only too rarely find adequate leadership.”⁴⁶ He points out that mulattos support the white minority of San Domingo; this is also happening in the West Indies in the 1930s. In fact, it is the coloreds’ envy of the white ruling class that divided the islands for years as the colored population actively sought to distance themselves from the dark skinned segment of society.⁴⁷ James intended the novel to teach West Indians that their future is in their

⁴³James, *The Black Jacobins*, 85-86.

⁴⁴James, *The Black Jacobins*, 25, 163-166; Black, *Trinidad*, 167; King, *C.L.R. James and Creolization*, 32. Vic Reid’s *New Day* (1949), the novel that is considered the first of those described as West Indian literature, used a similar technique relying on historic events in Jamaica. For a discussion of *New Day* see Chapter 5.

⁴⁵James, *The Black Jacobins*, 116.

⁴⁶James, *The Black Jacobins*, 25.

⁴⁷James, *The Black Jacobins*, 163-166; Black, *Trinidad*, 167; King, *C.L.R. James and Creolization*, 32.

own hands: in an interview James said that *The Black Jacobins* “did what it was intended to do. It gave a political analysis of a struggle for colonial independence.”⁴⁸

Ralph de Boissiere was another member of the Beacon Group who wrote West Indian novels. He was born in Trinidad in 1907 into a colored French Creole family. His father was a solicitor. He was educated at Queen’s Royal College with a classical British education. De Boissiere learned English history, which he remembered as consisting mostly of English military and naval conquests. In geography he recalled drawing maps of England showing its principal towns and seaports. Unlike most of the Beacon Group authors, though, de Boissiere became politically active. After watching first hand the Trinidad oilfield strikes of 1937, he joined the radical trade union movement. He worked as a typist and bookkeeper, but his political views outraged his employer, who fired him. He was unemployed for nine months in 1939. During World War II he was able to find work again, but it was his experiences in 1939 that caused him to move to Australia in 1947.⁴⁹

De Boissiere wrote the first of his two novels set in Trinidad, *Crown Jewel*, before he left the island. His second novel, *Rum and Coca-Cola* was a sequel to the first. Although they were not published until 1952 and 1956, de Boissiere wrote them in the 1940s so they are rightly considered part of pre-World War II literature coming from the Caribbean. The novels dealt with the events of 1935 to 1945, crucial years in Trinidad’s history, when the working-class movement began. Andre de Coudray, a principal character in both novels, is a semiautobiographical figure. In the book, he develops from

⁴⁸Dance, *New World Adams*, 115.

⁴⁹Sander, *Trinidad Awakening*, 115-116; Reinhard W. Sander, “Ralph de Boissiere,” in Dance, ed., *Fifty Caribbean Writers*, 151-153.

an insecure member of the colored middle class into an active participant in the working-class movement.

The de Coudray's belonged to one of those numerous cliques of island 'society.' Andre had been unable to find in this set any but people of limited understanding and petty social ambitions. This had obliged him to look among the 'lower classes' for men and women who could match his own interest in life and the arts. . . . On the one hand, he knew that to mix with black workers meant to suffer economic damnation. On the other hand he knew that to mix only with his set meant that intellectually, spiritually, morally, he would stifle.⁵⁰

After much contemplation, Andre finally makes his choice to abandon white society when the family of his English girlfriend, Gwenneth, rejects him because he is colored, although he could pass for white. Shortly after, he refuses to become a strikebreaker during a baker's strike. Gradually, Andre becomes more and more involved with the working class. On business trips to South Trinidad he meets Ben Le Maitre, an oil belt labor leader, who at first is suspicious of Andre's interest. When Le Maitre challenges his motives, Andre responds that the country club set in Port of Spain does not want him, "and how can one come in contact with the masses without understanding that they have a right to our leisure and luxury, which rests on their backs."⁵¹

At the same time Andre begins a relationship with Elena, the colored daughter of a dressmaker of Venezuelan descent. When he decides to marry Elena, his father disinherits him and expels him from the family home. Le Maitre had predicted this outcome if Andre decided to align with the working class; "They will hate you for life. They will hound you down. They will try to take your job from you. If you are sincere,

⁵⁰Ralph de Boissiere, *Crown Jewel* (London: Allison & Busby, 1981), 3. De Boissiere wrote a third novel, *No Saddles for Kangaroos* (Sydney: Australasian Book Society, 1964), which was based on his experiences in Australia.

⁵¹De Boissiere, *Crown Jewel*, 219, 251-252, 340.

you are forever an outcast.” Andre responded, “*these* are my people! I want to live, I want to help them fight for the new life they want!”⁵²

Andre’s friend Joe Elias, the son of a Syrian merchant, takes a different path. At first he appears equally committed to the workers’ movement, but it turns out that he only wants their political support. De Boissiere describes him as an opportunist politician. He supports worker causes to get elected but once elected he sides with the ruling elite.

The last major character in the novel is Cassie, a maid who lived in a barrack-yard at the beginning of the novel. When she is first introduced to the workers’ movement, she is skeptical; she cannot believe that any organization actually has the welfare of her class at heart. Once involved, Cassie’s political awareness develops quickly. She becomes a militant member of the working class and marries Le Maitre. She actively rallies support for the radical worker organization, especially the support of women. In one speech she argues,

“Some of you ‘fraid to join the Workers’ Welfare, others feel it have no sense in that, you believe Indian and nigger kean’t help one another to make life good for all of us. I say, comrades, put that foolish idea out of you’ minds. You have children. They will grow up naked, their belly big, their navel swell up. Those who don’t go to jail . . . will have a ‘fight to make eight or nine cents an hour to feed more children . . . You never try to work out hummuch servants getting’, but I could tell you. It’s three cents an hour. Who that benefitin’? It ain’t no benefit to you and those children. The benefit is for the capitalists. Plenty children, cheap labour! If some dead, what they have to do with that? Plenty more comin’ out you belly. We have to fight for trade unions, fight for higher wages, shorter hours – yes,

⁵²De Boissiere, *Crown Jewel*, 340-341.

less work for more money! Make them pay us! You ever see white people children with swell-up belly and big navel, and goin' about naked? No! Our wages payin' to keep them from that."⁵³

De Boissiere described *Crown Jewel* as a true social history of the period but not a historical record of events. He took events and restructured or rearranged them to simplify his story by limiting the number of characters he used. For example, the Workers' Welfare in the novel was based on the Negro Welfare Association of Uriah Butler that was politically active in the north of Trinidad, but de Boissiere had it active in the south as well. Le Maitre was a combination of two trade unionists, according to the author, who also operated in the north and had no direct connection to the oilfield strike.⁵⁴

De Boissiere wrote *Crown Jewel* after the 1937 strikes on the islands, so it reflected a more radical perspective than the novels of the other members of the Beacon Group.⁵⁵ The book showed a commitment to working-class politics that James's and Mendes's novels lacked. De Boissiere's protagonist was reminiscent of the post-World War I political activists who became middle-class leaders of the working class determined to gain more rights for laborers. De Boissiere became the first writer to criticize the commitment of some political leaders in his story of Andre's friend Joe. He presented Joe as an opportunist who appeared to side with the working class to get votes

⁵³De Boissiere, *Crown Jewel*, 261.

⁵⁴Sander, *Trinidad Awakening*, 130-131. For details of Butler's organization and trade unions in Trinidad in the 1930s, see Chapter 2.

⁵⁵For details about the 1937 strikes, see Chapter 2.

but then cooperated with the British once in office. De Boissiere was also the first West Indian novelist to use a female character involved in the labor movement.⁵⁶

Rum and Coca Cola was a sequel to *Crown Jewel*. De Boissiere's second novel focused on the changes in Trinidad society during World War II when the Americans came to the military bases at Chaguaramas and Waller Field. Many Trinidadians got jobs building the bases and doing other work for the Americans. The island was prosperous for the first time in many years.

In the novel it is Henri de Coudray, Andre's father, who reacts negatively to the American onslaught because his French Creole elite class had lost power to American capitalism. The Americans seize de Coudray's estate because it falls within an area designated for a naval base. He decides to retire to his beach house in the northeast part of the island but discovers that it too has been requisitioned by the Americans. The family's maid asks for a pay raise from \$8 per day to \$20. When the family refuses she goes to work for their American neighbor, who pays her what she asks. De Coudray cannot face the changes. He dies, but not before regretting his treatment of Andre, who also opposes the American domination of Trinidad because he views it as colonialism in a different form.⁵⁷

The primary characters from de Boissiere's first novel appear again in his second, this time playing supporting roles. In *Rum and Coca Cola* de Boissiere introduces middle-class politicians using socialist rhetoric and organized as the West Indian Socialist Party. The party wants limited reform in cooperation with the British, in

⁵⁶Mendes used a conversation between two women in the yard to present differing interpretations of the role of Cipriani played in Trinidadian politics, but he never took an overtly critical stand against the politician, as we saw in his discussion of *Black Fauns* earlier in this chapter.

⁵⁷Ralph de Boissiere, *Rum and Coca Cola* (London: Allison & Busby, 1984), 107-108.

contrast to the more militant Workers' Welfare, which de Boissiere introduced in his first novel, that wants significant reform under a government representative of the people of Trinidad. One character, La Roche, is a lawyer and Port of Spain city councilor. He views politics as a source of easy financial enrichment. He espouses a socialist rhetoric to gain power, but once in office he warns of extremists. La Roche

and other politicians were urged that every method be employed to encourage American capital into the island. La Roche had linked his fortunes with those of Arnold Walker. Arnold had invested a great deal of money in an American oil company that was seeking concessions in Trinidad. La Roche was insisting that measures be taken against 'subversive elements': the Americans would not invest their money in Trinidad unless they could be assured that our labour forces were not at the mercy of a foreign ideology.⁵⁸

A new member of the Workers' Welfare, Charlie, is a veteran of World War I, who goes through a series of successively worse personal and economic setbacks. Every experience increases his political understanding and strengthens his resolve. He lives in an abandoned old car that is destroyed to make room for the Americans. He loses job after job. He is beaten by an American soldier for passing out left-wing literature on the naval base.

Most of the novel revolves around the role of the Americans on the island, especially the way they undermine the old Creole elite. The pervasiveness of the American dollar and the American soldier reduce local respect for wealth and a white skin. They also undermine the working-class struggle. The Americans provide jobs, at good pay, to the Trinidadian working class, many of whom abandon the class struggle. Islanders often respect American power and money, while despising individual

⁵⁸De Boissiere, *Rum and Coca Cola*, 309.

Americans who treat them poorly. For example, Wal Brown is an American civilian who works at the naval base. He marries two Trinidadian women, even though he has a wife back in the United States. He abandons both and leaves them destitute.⁵⁹

De Boissiere's book ends in the immediate post-war years. The new nationalist party, dominated by middle-class opportunistic leaders, is the primary political party in Trinidad. The novel concludes at the first celebration of Carnival under the new government; Trinidadians are portrayed showing disrespect for the few remaining Americans, as though they have learned that they can challenge authority and win.⁶⁰

In his second novel de Boissiere again focused on middle-class discontent during what the Trinidadians called the American occupation of their island during World War II. When the Americans arrived in large numbers they offered better wages than anyone on the island had seen in the past. Their money, flashy cloths, and easy-going style commanded the respect of lower- and working-class islanders who often earned more respect from the Americans than they had from the British. This worked to undermine the working-class movement in Trinidad, which was not as dynamic as the one on Jamaica, for instance. With jobs and high wages there was no need for workers to protest. White American soldiers worked alongside working-class blacks who came to view them as ordinary. The sight of white soldiers doing manual labor helped undermine black respect for upper- and middle-class white British elites. De Boissiere also examined the fight for power between the Workers' Welfare, representing the militant working-class unions, and the West Indian Social Party, representing the more mainstream political parties, even those that described themselves as socialist. Although most

⁵⁹De Boissiere, *Rum and Coca Cola*, 73-74, 170-171.

⁶⁰De Boissiere, *Rum and Coca Cola*, 314.

political parties on the islands grew out of the union movement, parties were more conservative than the unions. In reality in Trinidad after the war there were two middle-class, conservative parties and several leftist parties. The leftists won all the available seats on the Legislative Council, but they represented several different parties and seldom cooperated with each other.⁶¹

De Boissiere's novels had no impact in the Caribbean at the time of their publication. In fact, it was not until their republication in 1981 and 1984 respectively that they reached audiences in the Caribbean, Britain, or the United States. They did, however, reflect the attitudes prevalent among the Beacon Group. De Boissiere was critical of many of the people who led the workers' movement, because he believed that many politicians betrayed the workers once they gained power. There was little criticism of Britain in his work; that would come later with other West Indian authors of the 1950s.⁶²

In conclusion, James, Mendes, and de Boissiere were all members of The Beacon Group but their experiences differed and so did their novels. Mendes and James wrote in the late 1920s and early 1930s when the growing union movement was peacefully lobbying for more concessions and more political input into island affairs from the British. When these authors looked around them they saw a class of people who were left out of the labor and political movements, an underclass that drew no attention at all. Mendes and James decided to introduce Trinidadians to the barrack-yard and its inhabitants. In the process they became the first West Indian authors to set their novels

⁶¹For details of the 1946 elections results in Trinidad see Chapter 4.

⁶²Sander, *Trinidad Awakening*, 144. De Boissiere's books were published by the Australasian Book Society, a left-wing publisher, and marketed in Eastern-bloc countries. Sander, "Ralph de Boissiere," in Dance, ed., *Fifty Caribbean Writers*, 156.

among the poorest of the islanders. Mendes also wrote about the people he knew best, the Portuguese Creole population. He introduced his readers to a society in which the British controlled every aspect of life, even at the expense of other European-descended whites.

In contrast, de Boissiere took a more active political role in Trinidad's political development. His involvement with unions and his participation in the rioting of the late 1930s was reflected in his novels. He was more critical of local leaders whom he believed cooperated too closely with the British. His novels also offered a realistic assessment of the American influence in Trinidad during the war – positive and negative. This was something no other author had attempted. De Boissiere's novels represented a middle ground between the West Indian novels of the 1930s and those of the 1950s.

Jamaica

West Indies literature developed differently in Jamaica. Because there was no consistently-published literary magazine to foster the creative element in Jamaica, there was no literary revolution in the 1930s as there was in Trinidad. The one Jamaican novelist to appear in the early twentieth century was Claude McKay, who came from a black peasant family. He was born in the small Jamaican village of Sunnyville in 1890. His father owned a small plot of land on which he grew cacao, coffee, bananas, sugar cane, and other tropical fruits and plants. When he was six he was sent to live with his schoolteacher brother near Montego Bay. He developed his love of poetry and literature by reading works his brother provided for him. At age sixteen he moved to Kingston where he first learned of the poverty, oppression, and racism of city life in Jamaica. In Kingston he began submitting his poetry written in the local Jamaican dialect to the local

newspaper, the *Daily Gleaner*, which published it. It caused an immediate sensation among Jamaicans who recognized their own patterns of speech in McKay's work. He moved to the United States in 1912 when he was twenty-three years old to pursue a career as a poet and writer. He was the first Jamaican author to attract international attention and acclaim. He made his reputation as an American writer during the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s. Though he was a Jamaican native, most of his work dealt with his life in the United States.⁶³

McKay acknowledged the British influence in his life, most importantly the fact that he spoke English. Even in his later life he admired the British who he said had given Jamaica its democratic spirit and respect for law and order. He praised the British for allowing black and colored Jamaicans to serve in government. He believed that economics was responsible for black poverty, not British colonial policy, an attitude shared by some politicians in the 1930s, like Grantley Adams of Barbados. McKay pointed out that he was respected in his village because his father was a peasant landholder. He never mentioned a racial motive for leaving Jamaica.⁶⁴

McKay's only novel with a Caribbean setting was *Banana Bottom* (1933), in which white missionaries send Bitia Plant, the daughter of a Jamaican peasant, to Britain for an education. Bitia is from the mountain village of Banana Bottom, where she spends her early years. When Bitia is a teenager she is tempted and molested by Crazy Bow,

⁶³Rhonda Cobham, "The Background," in Bruce King, ed., *West Indian Literature* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1979), 24; Irving Kaplan, Howard I. Blutstein, Kathryn Therese Johnston, and David S. McMorris, *Area Handbook for Jamaica* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office), 175-176; Eugenia Collier, "Claude McKay," in Dance, ed., *Fifty Caribbean Writers*, 284-285.

⁶⁴Tyrone Tillery, *Claude McKay: A Black Poet's Struggle for Identity* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 4, 10, 14-16. Tillery points out that McKay wrote about his views of the British later in his life. Tillery believes that conditions in Jamaica were not so idyllic as McKay portrayed them to be. See Tillery, *Claude McKay*, 16-20. See Chapter 2 for details of Grantley Adams's career in the 1930s and early 40s.

whom McKay describes as a harmless idiot. The news travels quickly through the village, where it is not an unusual event. It is not scandalous; it is not shocking; it is just news. Bitá is just another girl from the village.⁶⁵

In the neighboring town of Jubilee, the Reverend Malcolm Craig and his wife Priscilla run the local church and mission. Sister Phibby Patroll, a resident of Banana Bottom, sees an opportunity to shock the Englishmen. She walks fifteen miles, traveling all night, from Banana Bottom to Jubilee. McKay is careful to point out that Sister Phibby thinks the incident is sad, as any good Christian would, but she still takes satisfaction in seeing Mrs. Craig's look of shock when she hears the news. The Craigs react by rescuing Bitá from her life in the village and sending her to England for an education.⁶⁶

When Bitá returns to Jamaica after seven years abroad, it is an important local event both in Banana Bottom and Jubilee. She is the only black girl the locals know who has been brought up abroad and educated in England, the mother country. Bitá, though, is very much the girl who left. She revels in her return. To Bitá, "The noises of the market were sweeter in her ears than a symphony. Accents and rhythms, movements and colours, nuances that might have passed unnoticed if she had never gone away, were now revealed to her in all their striking detail."⁶⁷

Bitá's job on her return is at the mission with the Craigs, living a British style existence, but her feelings are more Jamaican than British. When Bitá attends the Emancipation Day festival in Banana Bottom, she has to confront her dilemma: is she a

⁶⁵Claude McKay, *Banana Bottom* (New York: Harper, 1933), 10. McKay wrote two other novels, *Home to Harlem* (New York: Harper, 1928), set in New York City, and *Banjo: A Story Without a Plot* (New York: Harper, 1929), set in Marseilles, France, plus several volumes of poetry.

⁶⁶McKay, *Banana Bottom*, 16.

⁶⁷McKay, *Banana Bottom*, 41.

part of the native Jamaican society in which she grew up or the white Creole society in which her education places her. She attends a local tea-party and joins the dancers, both of which are forbidden by her new moral code. "Bita danced freely released, danced as she had never danced since she was a girl at a picnic at Tabletop, wiggling and swaying and sliding along, the memories of her tomboyish girlhood washing sparkling over her like water cascading over one bathing upon a hot summer's day."⁶⁸

The local girls encourage Bita and again Phibby Patroll takes the news back to Jubilee. Mrs. Craig reprimands Bita and decides to speed up plans for Bita's impending marriage to Herald Newton Day, a local boy being groomed at Tabernacle Theological College. Bita, though, keeps returning to Banana Bottom where she is more comfortable. According to Bita, "It was so much pleasanter and freer at Banana Bottom."⁶⁹

The more time Bita spends in the village, the more she clashes with Mrs. Craig, who banishes Herald Newton from her life forever because Bita is not worthy of him. Mrs. Craig condemns Bita's new friends and the broken English they speak. Bita defends them by pointing out that her parents also spoke broken English. The confrontations convince Bita that she has to leave Jubilee and the Craigs and return to her roots. Bita concludes,

It would be impossible for her to stay when she felt not only resentment, but a natural opposition against Mrs. Craig. A latent hostility would make her always want to do anything of which Mrs. Craig disapproved. Bita could not quite explain this strong feeling to herself. It was just there . . . Maybe it was an old unconscious thing now manifesting itself, because it was to Mrs. Craig, a woman whose attitude of life was alien to hers, and not to her parents, she owned the entire shaping of her career.⁷⁰

⁶⁸McKay, *Banana Bottom*, 84.

⁶⁹McKay, *Banana Bottom*, 161.

⁷⁰McKay, *Banana Bottom*, 211.

When she returns to Banana Bottom, Bitá becomes reacquainted with Jubban, her father's drayman. Jubban protects her and comforts her when her father dies. Bitá thinks of him as someone on whom she can rely and marries him. Bitá's return to her roots is complete. "Her music, her reading, her thinking were the flowers of her intelligence and he [Jubban] the root in the earth upon which she was grafted, both nourished by the same soil."⁷¹

Claude McKay was shaped by his experiences in the United States and by growing up in Jamaica. He wrote, of course, when Jamaicans were just beginning to search for an identity separate from England. When Bitá returned to her rural Jamaican village, she rebelled against the alien values of England and actively asserted her native cultural origins. She emerged as a Creole composite of her experiences. She did not renounce her education; she continued to read, listen to music, and use her intellectual ability to reflect on her experiences. Yet, she was a Jamaican girl from Banana Bottom and it was there that she was comfortable. McKay was trying to teach Jamaicans not to accept a life of subservience. He showed that it was not necessary to adopt the British standard. Jamaicans could establish their own identity, free of the British, but without renouncing some elements of their influence, like education. Yet again, like the members of the Beacon Group in Trinidad, McKay was not overly critical of the British.

Like Trinidad, Jamaica had its own literary magazine. *Focus* was the first Jamaican literary magazine that was associated with the nationalist movement. The goal of the magazine was to bring attention to political reform and to the masses on the island. *Focus* was published inconsistently in 1943, 1948, 1956, and 1960 because of a lack of

⁷¹McKay, *Banana Bottom*, 313.

funding. The people responsible for its launching included Edna Manley, an accomplished sculptor and the wife of Norman Manley, the political activist and future prime minister; Philip Sherlock, Oxford-educated scholar and historian of the West Indies; and Vic Reid and Roger Mais, who became part of the literary movement of the 1950s that produced the first of the works defined as West Indies literature. The journal included short stories, poetry, legends, and plays. Contributors took a nationalistic approach to literature by describing life in the West Indies and attempting to foster a sense of national pride. They were committed to portraying the realities of Jamaican life with articles detailing the misery, poverty, and frustration of most Jamaicans. Because *Focus* published issues so sporadically, it never had a strong following. It was also far less controversial than some magazines of the period, particularly *The Beacon*.⁷²

Jamaica did not produce a group of writers in the 1930s like those who emerged in Trinidad. Although Jamaica was just as active politically, the literary tradition was less strong. *Focus* was not a financial success, but unlike *The Beacon*, which suffered the same fate, *Focus* did not have a wealthy benefactor to support its production. The author's who began their careers writing in *Focus* would emerge as leaders of Jamaica's cultural scene a bit later in the 1950s.⁷³

Conclusion

Much of the West Indian literature of the 1930s was ignored by critics in the 1950s and 1960s when they first began to describe "West Indian literature." It is clear, though, that the literary magazines of the 1920s to the 1940s were crucial to the

⁷²Sander, "The Thirties and Forties," in King, ed., *West Indian Literature*, 46-47; King, "Introduction," in King, ed., *West Indian Literature*, 2; Irving Kaplan, Howard I. Blutstein, Kathryn Theresa Johnston and David S. McMorris, *Area Handbook for Jamaica* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), 176-177.

⁷³See Chapter 5 for details of their work and their influence.

development of the West Indian literature that would emerge in full in the 1950s. The men and women who wrote in the 1930s established the first true West Indian fiction. They introduced local themes and local language. They were different from those who preceded them, most of whom were British, in that the general intent of the writers was to encourage the growth of something West Indian. They never discussed the possibility of West Indian independence. They were content to establish their own social and cultural identities as West Indians. Mendes and James in Trinidad presented a people who normally went unnoticed. McKay portrayed a Jamaican reality with which he was familiar, a person educated in Britain who came home and found that she did not fit into either her own or the British society on the island. Only de Boissiere, a product of the uprisings of the late 1930s, was critical of what he saw, but he saved most of his criticism for the new local leaders who failed to challenge the British in order to achieve change. It was the next generation of writers who would become activists in trying to shape the West Indies.⁷⁴ In the interim, though, the islands began the process of political separation from the British.

⁷⁴We will follow their story in Chapters 5 and 6.

CHAPTER IV
WEST INDIES FEDERATION
1947-1962

“From the Long Days of Cruelty and the Long Nights of Pain”¹

When World War II ended, activists on the islands who had been calling for reform and independence from Britain renewed their demands. By this time, conditions in Britain and the world had changed. Colonies stood condemned in world opinion. The British had economic problems following the war, including a shortage of goods and equipment plus rising prices. They also had to deal with the complications of reintroducing soldiers to civilian life and finding them jobs. They slowly began to meet demands from their colonies for increased local control and independence. In the West Indies the British proposed administrative changes that would put in place a centralized government that could respond quickly and efficiently to local problems. West Indians wanted independence. They worked out a compromise – the West Indies Federation, which formally came into being in 1958.

The history of the islands between 1947 and 1962 consisted of a process of gradually distancing themselves from the British. Although relations appeared to remain cordial, the period brought new leaders, who took a more radical stance in their relations with Britain to many of the islands. These new political leaders emerged from the same

¹Martin Carter, “Poems of Resistance,” in Sandra Pouchet Paquet, “The Fifties,” in Bruce King, ed., *West Indian Literature* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1979), 75.

colonial society that produced the first generation of West Indian writers. Their views and attitudes were similar, shaped by their experiences of colonialism and their search for independence. In this chapter we will explore political developments on the islands of Jamaica, Trinidad, and Barbados in order to compare the political attitudes of new leaders with those of writers of the same generation.² The discussion will be broken up into two parts. The first section will trace the development of the West Indies Federation, a cooperative attempt by the islands to gain independence. During this period the government of the three larger islands worked closely with the British to decrease their political dependence on Britain. The second part of the chapter will focus on individual efforts by the islands to attain political independence and economic stability without direct control from Britain. West Indian authors, who we will look at in the following two chapters, became increasingly critical of both the British and the new island governments. They attacked the British for failing to provide the islands with the knowledge and experience necessary to succeed as independent nations. They criticized local governments for failing to bring political stability and economic advances to the islands.

West Indies Federation

In September 1947 representatives of the British islands of the West Indies met with British government representatives at Montego Bay, Jamaica, to discuss the establishment of a West Indies Federation under which the colonies eventually would attain independence. The British stressed the view that individual islands could not meet their economic goals or satisfy the needs of their people for education, housing, and

²The smaller islands developed at a slower pace and received their independence from Britain at the end of the timeframe of this study. When the writers associated with this study wrote their novels, they were examining the conditions on the larger islands.

medical care, without some kind of cooperative political venture, preferably federation.³ Despite some disagreements, the ten Anglophone islands of the Caribbean agreed to establish a political federation of the British Caribbean territories on the Australian model, where each constituent unit retained complete control over all matters except those specifically assigned to the federal government. They voted to give the unit governments increased responsibility for political development. They committed themselves to increased communications among the islands and to the development of agriculture, education and social services. In addition, the representatives put in place measures to further foster international trade. They also argued that the Federation remain dependent upon Britain, and under the leadership of a British-appointed governor-general, for several years until it was able to stand on its own economically.⁴

At Montego Bay the delegates created the Standing Closer Association Committee as a permanent body to study problems connected with creating the federation and to make recommendations to the island legislatures. The Committee was composed of one member from each of the legislatures of the Leeward and Windward Islands, and two representatives each from Jamaica, Trinidad, and Barbados, along with a British chairman and secretary appointed by the secretary of state for the colonies. It began holding meetings in November 1948 and issued its report in October 1949.⁵

³Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Conference on the Closer Association of the British West Indian Colonies*, Part 2: *Proceedings* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1948), 6-8.

⁴Colonial Office, *Conference on Closer Association*, Part 2, 105-106, 109-112. For details of the development and organization of the West Indies Federation from its inception to 1962 see Sharon C. Sewell, "British Decolonization in the Caribbean: The West Indies Federation" (M.A. Thesis, Oklahoma State University, 1997).

⁵Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Report of the Caribbean Standing Closer Association Committee, 1948-49* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1950), 26-33; *Conference on Closer Association*, Part 2, 103-104.

The Committee concluded that “geography alone suggests the wisdom of not attempting too close or all-embracing a Federation for this widely scattered region.”⁶ It stressed that the federal government was not meant to rule over the territorial governments. The areas under federal control, referred to as the executive list, consisted of such things as defense, external affairs, federal courts, federal law, interpretation of federal legislation, federal elections, raising loans outside the federation, and federal public services. Federal control also extended to federal agencies and institutions for research and investigations, professional and technical training and the promotion of special studies. The Committee issued what it called the concurrent list, which included issues on which both the federal and territorial governments could legislate, such as aviation, aliens, arbitration, banking, census, copyrights, criminal law and penal administration, currency, development of industries, fisheries, immigration, import duties, marriage and divorce, postal services, shipping and navigation, telecommunications, trade and commerce, and trade unions. The Committee acknowledged that important issues were absent from the lists and thus left to local control, including agriculture, education, housing, and the maintenance of public order. It asserted that these functions were more appropriately left to local control, citing the example set by Great Britain itself in regard to the division of authority between the central and local governments there.⁷

Until the federation was able to stand alone, the Committee agreed it would have to rely on Britain for economic assistance. However, it stipulated that Britain must give

⁶Colonial Office, *Standing Closer Association Committee*, 16.

⁷Colonial Office *Standing Closer Association Committee*, 16-17, 79-81; Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Development and Welfare in the West Indies for the Year 1950* (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1951), 16.

the federation freedom to initiate and administer its financial and economic, as well as its political, affairs. The federation had to be self-reliant as much as possible. Once in operation the islands would contribute a percentage of customs revenues and the net receipts from postal services to finance the federal government.⁸

The islands' responses to the work of the Committee were generally positive. The Legislatures of Jamaica and Trinidad adopted the resolutions favoring political federation based on the report. In Barbados the Legislature accepted the report, although it declared that under the structure proposed the federation would be nothing but a glorified colony.⁹

It was now up to the islands to form a functioning federation. Representatives used a series of ad hoc conferences to discuss committee reports and specific issues. British representatives attended the conferences as well, but they did not participate in the debate unless asked and never cast a vote.¹⁰ The island Legislatures chose the delegations that attended the conferences, which typically included each island's Prime Minister plus elected members of its Legislature. As the islands gained more control over their own local governments, their potential delegate choices widened, so the participants varied from one conference to another. Although many names appear on every list, three men came to dominate the conference process: Grantley Adams of Barbados and Norman Manley of Jamaica, both of whom supported cooperation with the

⁸Colonial Office, *Standing Closer Association Committee*, 23-25; Colonial Office, *Development and Welfare*, 1950, 26.

⁹Great Britain, British Information Services, *The British Colonial Territories in 1950* (London: British Government Reference Division, 1951), 63; Great Britain, British Information Services, *The Colonial Territories, 1951-1952* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1952), 32; Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Report on the Leeward Islands for the Years 1949 and 1950* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1951), 7.

¹⁰After the 1953 London Conference, Grantley Adams told the Barbados Assembly that nothing had been forced on the delegates by the Colonial Office, which had stressed it was for the West Indians to create their own constitution for the Federation. See Elisabeth Wallace, *The British Caribbean: From the Decline of Colonialism to the End of Federation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 109.

British, and Eric Williams of Trinidad, who argued that total independence was imperative for the islands.¹¹

The conference process involved resolving controversial issues that divided the islands. The Standing Committee on Closer Association had recommended Trinidad for the site of the federal capital, though it offered no explanation for its selection. At the 1953 London Conference the island delegates rejected the selection, calling Trinidad politically backward because it had no clear-cut political parties, and citing the racial unrest between blacks and East Indians that made the island politically unstable. They recommended Grenada but the report of the meeting did not explain why. The Standing Committee tabled the question for the time being. At a later London meeting in 1956 representatives of the islands again failed to reach agreement on the site of the federal capital. They decided to appoint a fact-finding commission of three non-West Indians to nominate three sites. Francis Mudie, a West Indian expatriate living in Britain, chaired what became known as the Mudie Commission. It recommended three potential sites – Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad. In 1957 representatives of the island met in Jamaica to review the Mudie Commission report. In just two votes the delegates selected Trinidad as the host island for the federal capital; once again the report of the meeting failed to explain why the committee made this choice.¹²

In the course of moving toward federation, the islands also began to cooperate in a number of ventures. In 1951, they established the Regional Economic Committee to

¹¹John Mordecai, *The West Indies: The Federal Negotiations* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1968), 467-469.

¹²On the first ballot Jamaica, the island most distant from the others, received the lowest number of votes, so it was eliminated as a choice. On the second ballot, Jamaica threw its support to Trinidad. See Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Report of the Chaguaramas Joint Commission* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1958), 1; Colonial Office, *Standing Closer Association Committee*, 19-20; Mordecai, *The West Indies*, 66-70.

promote and coordinate regional action on trade, export industries, communications, and public finance.¹³ Participation in the Caribbean Commission, which was established during World War II to promote consultation and collaboration in addressing regional problems affecting the entire Caribbean area, also fostered a sense of cooperation among the British West Indian islanders.¹⁴ As early as 1949, C.W.W. Greenidge, a retired Barbadian lawyer, proclaimed that there was a new West Indian attitude apparent in the region. He believed that islanders now considered themselves West Indians, regardless of the island they occupied or their specific cultural heritage.¹⁵

When the West Indies Federation formally came into existence on January 3, 1958, it was not as an independent country. Instead, the British appointed Governor General was Lord Hailes, who served as the Queen's representative to the Federation. Hailes was not part of the Colonial Office. He had been parliamentary private secretary from 1931-39 and conservative chief whip and government chief whip from 1951-55. From 1955-57 Hailes was minister of works. His appointment highlighted the fact that the islands had been unable to free themselves from British control. Lord Hailes was virtually unknown in the West Indies. The British government had appointed him without submitting a list of potential candidates to the island leaders, although it had discussed with them the qualities necessary to be Governor General. Some West Indians argued that the British government had sacrificed the well-being of the Federation in

¹³Great Britain, Colonial Office, *The West Indies: A Nation in the Making* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1958), 17.

¹⁴See details of the establishment of the Caribbean Commission in Chapter 2.

¹⁵C.W.W. Greenidge, "The Present Outlook in the British West Indies," *Caribbean Commission Monthly Information Bulletin*, 2 (July 1949), 362.

order to give a political plum to a party official. The islanders wanted an experienced colonial civil servant in the position. They did not get their way.¹⁶

The Federation also included a bicameral Legislature made up of a Senate and House of Representatives. The Senate consisted of nineteen members appointed by the Governor General. He selected two from each territory except Montserrat which had one. The House of Representatives had forty-five members, seventeen from Jamaica, ten from Trinidad, five from Barbados, one from Montserrat, and two each from the other six islands. All were elected by universal adult suffrage. Under this system, though, Governor General Hailes had sweeping powers. In addition to appointing all senators, he selected justices of the Federal Supreme Court and members of the Public Service Commission. He could refuse to agree to any bill passed by the House or Senate and reserve it for review by the British government. In reality, though, Hailes asserted few of his powers and by 1960 he had relinquished some of them.¹⁷

The first Federal elections took place on March 25, 1958. Under the Constitution, candidates for Federal office could not be members of their island governments. Because of this several men whom the islanders expected to lead them through the early years of federation, most notably Norman Manley and Eric Williams, decided not to run for Federal office. They believed they could serve the Federation best by supporting it at home. The results of the election produced a surprise. West Indians expected the Federal Labour Party (FLP), which was made up of the People's National Movement of Trinidad,

¹⁶Wallace, *The British Caribbean*, 138; Mordecai, *The West Indies*, 72.

¹⁷Great Britain, British Information Services, *Political Development in the United Kingdom Dependencies* (New York: British Information Services, 1961), 15; Douglas G. Anglin, "The Political Development of the West Indies," in David Lowenthal, ed., *The West Indies Federation: Perspectives on a New Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 49-50, 52-53; Mordecai, *The West Indies*, 75-77.

the People's National Party of Jamaica, the Barbados Labour Party, and other labor parties in power on all the smaller islands except St. Vincent, to gain control of the federal government. However, the FLP won only twenty-two of the forty-five seats available. The Democratic Labour Party (DLP), which virtually had been ignored as a source of leadership, gained twenty seats, including a majority from both Jamaica and Trinidad. Three independent candidates, two from Grenada and one from Barbados, garnered the remaining seats, and commanded the balance of power in the House. In local elections the ruling parties of Williams in Trinidad and Manley in Jamaica suffered defeat as well. In fact, the island voters showed a marked lack of interest in the new federal government. For example, in Barbados only twenty-six per cent of registered voters went to the polls. The political parties that had guided the pre-federal process would not control the new Federal government nor the governments of the major islands. With Manley, the most popular supporter of Federation unavailable, Grantley Adams, leader of the Barbados Labour Party, was elected Prime Minister of the Federation.¹⁸

An important issue that the islands had failed to solve prior to the elections involved the freedom of movement of persons within the Federation. Barbados, the Leeward Islands, and the Windward Islands considered unrestricted movement among the islands a keystone of Federation and one of its prime benefits. These island had severe economic problems because their agricultural industries could not provide enough jobs to support their large populations. Trinidad feared, however, that with free movement it would be saddled with a rush of immigrants who would aggravate its already serious social and economic problems. Trinidad's oil industry provided jobs for

¹⁸Mordecai, *The West Indies*, 86; Anglin, "The Political Development of the West Indies," 47-48; Great Britain, British Information Services, *Barbados* (London: Central Office of Information, 1966), 7; British Information Services, *Political Development*, 15.

Trinidadians plus some immigrants, but it could not support the large number of immigrants the island anticipated when immigration barriers came down. Although Trinidad was one of the wealthier British islands, it still had the same social and economic problems of overpopulation that plagued the others.¹⁹ Finally, in December, leaders and ministers of the national and island governments met to discuss the issue. They concluded that if Britain restricted immigration after independence to its own territory, the immigration-related problems in Trinidad would increase. Most West Indians emigrated not within the islands but to England. If that option was closed, residents of the smaller islands would see Trinidad as the larger island offering them the most economic opportunities. In addition, Trinidad was wealthier than Jamaica and geographically closer to the Leeward and Windward Islands. Thus, Trinidad recommended that the federal government control freedom of movement, but that until 1967 individual island legislatures would have the power to restrict entry. This would give the islands time to establish immigration agreements among themselves.²⁰

In 1960, the British decided to take a more active role in the federal negotiations in order to move the process forward in anticipation of independence. At a London Conference in January 1960, Iain Macleod, the colonial secretary, presented the minimum requirements for an independent Federation, including a defense force, the power to negotiate and conclude treaties, and a central government that controlled the currency and had sufficient financial resources for its own expenditures. The British required a customs union as well, and freedom of movement among the islands, but Macleod diplomatically conceded that the British might accept progress toward finalizing

¹⁹“The British West Indies and Migration: Population Pressures on Resources,” *The World Today* 14 (November 1958), 474, 476.

²⁰Mordecai, *The West Indies*, 310-314; Wallace, *The British Caribbean*, 176.

these plans rather than finished solutions. He concluded by saying that the British considered the West Indies particularly well suited for independence because of its long experience of parliamentary government, its respect for the rule of law, and its emphasis on the value of the individual. Finally, he promised that on May 31, 1962, the Federation would become an independent member of the British Commonwealth, and that each island would have internal self-government before that date.²¹

In conclusion, when the British first proposed the idea of Federation after World War II, many island leaders were reluctant to consider the option. There was little history of cooperation among the islands; some local leaders knew each other only by reputation. They quickly realized, though, that a political alliance was the best way to achieve independence. From their first meeting in 1947 islanders worked to establish a political unit that would satisfy every island. In a series of ad hoc conferences they debated critical points. Although British Colonial Office representatives attended, they rarely intervened. By 1958 the islands had a working Federation but not one independent of Britain. Negotiations on the final details of the Federal system were now in the hands of a federal Senate and House of Representatives elected by West Indians themselves. A Governor General would remain in place until official independence in 1962. Meanwhile the individual islands had continued to work towards internal self-government. Power was shifting away from Britain on the larger islands, Jamaica, Trinidad, and Barbados, but gradually. The following section will discuss political and economic changes on these three islands up to 1962 when Jamaica and Trinidad became independent. It was

²¹Wallace, *The British Caribbean*, 164; Elisabeth Wallace, "The West Indies: Improbable Federation?" *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 27 (November 1961), 449-450, 452.

their experiences as they loosened ties to Britain that West Indian writers drew upon for their novels.

Jamaica

Political developments in Jamaica moved forward quickly after World War II. In 1945 Alexander Bustamante, head of the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP), became leader of the Jamaica House of Representatives.²² The British continued to dominate Jamaica, though, leaving Bustamante with little real power. Norman Manley and the People's National Party (PNP), the opposition, benefited from the JLP's ineffectiveness in office when they courted and won support from the unemployed, who complained that the JLP had not created jobs or welfare proposals to help them. Bustamante did win some pay raises for workers but unemployment remained widespread and the cost of living kept rising. In 1946 and 1947 violence in the streets of Kingston between supporters of the two parties was common; the poorest inhabitants fought to get their party elected believing that improvement for them would come as a result. In 1949 the JLP won a majority of seats in the House, but the PNP also increased its representation. Meanwhile, one improvement to the Jamaican economy in the 1940s resulted from the discovery of bauxite in 1942. After negotiations between the British, Jamaicans, and individual companies, Alcan of Canada and Reynolds and Kaiser of the United States, the companies agreed to protect farm land by keeping it in production until it was needed and by restoring it after it was mined. Jamaica earned about L325,000 per year under the original contract with these companies.²³

²²See Chapter 2 for details of the Jamaica Labour Party and its founding.

²³Alex Zeidenfelt, "Political and Constitutional Reform in Jamaica," *Journal of Politics* 14 (August 1952): 538; F.S.J. Ledgister, *Class Alliances and the Liberal Authoritarian State: The Roots of Post-Colonial Democracy in Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Surinam* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World

In 1953 a British Order in Council granted Jamaicans greater responsibility in governing their island by inaugurating a ministerial system, in which a chief minister and seven other ministers from the House of Representatives joined the official and nominated members on the Executive Council, an instrument of the Crown Colony system. The new ministers had the authority to manage the internal affairs of Jamaica through their leadership of government departments, a responsibility the 1944 Constitution had failed to give them.²⁴ Bustamante, the former labor leader and JLP party boss, became the first Chief Minister. The role of the Legislative Council, another instrument of the Crown Colony system, was reduced to consideration of legislation passed by the elected House of Representatives. Still, the Governor-General retained considerable power that he could exercise without the consent of the Executive Council.²⁵

By 1955 the JLP and the PNP had reinvented themselves in order to appeal to voters in the middle, between the white elite and the black lower class. The JLP began to retreat from total support for the Federation, because Butamante believed that Jamaica, as one of the two wealthiest island with Trinidad, would shoulder most of the financial burden of the independent Federation. He also believed that Jamaica was politically and economically stable enough to achieve independence on its own. At the same time, Manley and the PNP distanced themselves from socialism by announcing that private property would be safe under a PNP government. Of the 750,000 eligible voters, 500,000 participated in the 1955 elections; the PNP received more than fifty percent of the vote

Press, 1998), 71-72; Don Taylor, *The Years of Challenge: The Commonwealth and the British Empire, 1945-1958* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1960), 193-194.

²⁴See Chapter for a discussion of the 1944 Constitution.

²⁵Wendell Bell, *Jamaican Leaders: Political Attitudes in a New Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974 (?)), 54; Clinton V. Black, *History of Jamaica* (London: Collins Clear-Type Press, 1961), 235; Ledgister, *Class Alliances*, 73.

and won eighteen seats in the House of Representatives. The JLP won fourteen seats. Norman Manley took over as Chief Minister. Manley remained committed to bringing Jamaica increased autonomy within the framework of the Federation, arguing that it was the only path to self-government in the West Indies.²⁶

In 1957 a Cabinet called the Council of Ministers replaced the Executive Council of the Crown Colony era. The Council of Ministers contained eight members from the House of Representatives and two members appointed by the Governor from the Legislative Council. A new ministry, Home Affairs, assumed responsibility over most matters previously dealt with by the colonial secretary and some responsibilities of the British appointed attorney general, who served under the direction of the Governor-General. Still, the British maintained ultimate control.²⁷

In general, the make up of the government included more Jamaicans. In 1939 Jamaicans had occupied about fifty per cent of the top governmental positions, defined as elected political leaders, higher-level civil servants and officials, and those who held nominated positions. By 1954, the number of those positions held by Jamaicans had risen to seventy-five per cent. Some of the growth was the result of islanders replacing the British in government posts; some was the result of the creation of new posts. For example, the number of political leaders elected to the House of Representatives increased from fourteen in 1939 to thirty-two in 1954. Most of the islanders who qualified to take these positions were urban-born, leaving the majority of agricultural workers outside the governing bodies. Elected officials more closely mirrored the

²⁶Black, *History of Jamaica*, 235; Ledgister, *Class Alliances*, 73-74; Rex Nettleford, ed., *Norman Manley and the New Jamaica: Selected Speeches and Writings, 1938-68* (New York: Africana Publishing, 1971), 134-142; John D. Forbes, *Jamaica: Managing Political and Economic Change* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1985), 12.

²⁷Black, *History of Jamaica*, 237.

general population in terms of education; only about thirty-six per cent had more than elementary school education in 1954. Higher civil servants and appointed officials tended to be better educated. They were also light or white skinned, the groups most favored by the British when they gave jobs to local islanders. The black masses were increasing their representation through elected leaders, but they still had little access to higher-level positions. By 1958 elected political leaders were better educated on average, but still less so than civil servants and appointees.²⁸

A new constitution in 1959 reflected Manley's efforts to distance the island from Britain. It granted Jamaica internal self-government within the Federation. It assigned all matters relating to defense and international relations to the Federal government. The Legislative Council was enlarged to twenty-one members; the British-appointed attorney general was removed from that body. The Governor retained his veto power but could exercise it only with the advice of the cabinet, a substantial reduction of his powers. The House of Representatives was expanded to forty-five members.²⁹

In the election of 1959 the PNP retained power. During his term of office Manley worked to improve conditions for Jamaicans. The government provided subsidies to farmers to help them increase production. It negotiated for new markets in which to sell Jamaican products. It worked to provide greater access to education by increasing the number of scholarship and free spaces available to local students. Manley successfully renegotiated outside investments in the bauxite industry by three companies – Reynolds and Kaiser from the United States and Alumina Jamaica Limited, a Canadian company. Jamaica's share of bauxite revenues increased from L350,000 to L3.7 million. By 1957

²⁸Bell, *Jamaican Leaders*, 55-70; British Information Services, *Political Developments*, 17.

²⁹Black, *History of Jamaica*, 238.

Jamaica was the largest producer of bauxite in the world. In the end, though, the Manley-led government could not meet the rising expectations of Jamaicans. Although the economy grew, the population grew faster. Overpopulation contributed to unemployment, even with an expanding economy. In 1952, ten per cent of businesses earned seventy-three per cent of gross income. By 1960, nineteen per cent of businesses earned ninety-one per cent. Their wealth and income continued to be concentrated in the hands of a small percentage of the population. The majority of poor blacks still survived on earnings from small farming, domestic service, unskilled laboring jobs, and small trade. Between 1954 and 1960 the government allocated 150,000 acres to establish 20,000 new farms under an expanded land settlement scheme. Their plan raised the percentage of small farmers owning land from sixty to seventy-seven percent. The government also increased the amount of credit and the number of subsidies it offered farmers. Although some poor families benefited from this government aid, farm production actually declined, because other areas of the economy, like manufacturing and government, offered more opportunities for better jobs and wages.³⁰

Jamaica managed to avoid most of the race problems that plagued many of the islands because blacks dominated the island and most other racial groups comprised a small minority of the population. As already noted, there was considerable violence between the two major political parties; this would characterize Jamaican society for years to come. The violence often stemmed from dissatisfaction with the pace of economic improvements, but it manifested itself in political violence as supporters of each major party tried to get their leaders elected to office. The only group on the island

³⁰Nettleford, *Norman Manley*, 188-191; Carl Stone, *Class, State, and Democracy in Jamaica* (New York: Praeger, 1986), 31-32, 70-79; Forbes, *Jamaica*, 12.

that was alienated seriously from society was the Rastafarians, a religious group that emphasized its African antecedents and denounced white society and the Jamaican power elite of any color. Its focus on African culture and religious consciousness appealed to the lower classes, particularly young, urban blacks who often were left out of most economic advances. From 1954 there was steady deterioration in the relationship between this religious group and the police, resulting in increased arrests and verbal sparring. Jamaican officials blamed rioting in May 1959 in the depressed section of Kingston on the Rastafarians, although it was actually more widespread including the urban poor whether they were part of the religious group or not. In June 1960 there was another major clash between the police and the religious group. At this point the Rastafarians asked the head of the University College of the West Indies to intercede to find a solution to their problems. Its report concluded that the great majority of Rastafarians were peaceful citizens who did not engage in violence. It described Rastafarian doctrine as radical, but only in the broad sense that it opposed the oppression of the black race. Although college officials believed that the Rastafarians' problems were common to all the underprivileged in Jamaica, they suggested a mission to Ethiopia to investigate the possibilities of repatriation. Most Jamaicans dismissed the idea as unpatriotic and irrational, but Manley decided to pursue it. He led a delegation, including Rastafarians, on a mission to Africa in 1961. Although no agreements resulted from the trip, the religious group appreciated Manley's efforts on their behalf. They would remain outside the Jamaican mainstream, though, for years.³¹

³¹Nettleford, *Norman Manley*, 277-280; Philip Sherlock and Hazel Bennett, *The Story of the Jamaican People* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle, 1998), 396-398; Carl Stone, "Decolonization and the Caribbean State System: The Case of Jamaica," in Paget Henry and Carl Stone, eds., *The Newer*

In conclusion, Jamaica made political advances in these years by relying on the two major political parties. Both the JLP and the PNP worked with the British to achieve progress. In 1953 Jamaica began to function under a ministerial system, but the British Governor retained considerable power. In 1957 Jamaicans gained more control, but the Governor was still there. It was not until 1959 that Britain granted Jamaica internal self-government within the Federation. The Governor was still in place but his powers were reduced substantially. Economically the island advanced as well. Government subsidies and land reform helped farmers produce more; new markets helped them sell more. By 1957 Jamaica was the largest producer of bauxite in the world. Unfortunately, the population grew faster than the economy; the average Jamaican saw little improvement in his situation. Although race-related problems were minimal in Jamaica because blacks dominated the islands, religious differences involving the Rastafarians and unrelenting poverty resulted in violence and rioting. Jamaica had not solved its problems yet.

Trinidad

In Trinidad, the post World War II years continued a shift in political power from the white upper class to the middle-class black and East Indian population. These two communities, though, had been suspicious of each other since East Indian indentured servants were brought in to replace former slaves in the fields. Both groups would refuse to cooperate on most issues.

Political parties developed differently in Trinidad than in most islands. Parties in Trinidad were not defined clearly, as they were in Jamaica. Beginning in the 1940s they formed prior to elections and disbanded soon after. The labor movement, which defined

Caribbean: Decolonization, Democracy, and Development (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1983), 55.

party politics in Jamaica, remained fragmented in Trinidad. The situation left the middle class in control of the island. In the 1946 general elections conservative middle-class voters had two options. The Trinidad Labour Party (TLP) was now the party of the urban mixed-race, middle-class, white-collar, worker, a small group with little influence.³² The Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) was a revised version of the Ratepayers Association, whose supporters remained pro-business. Neither party had mass appeal.³³

Labor had more support, but it too was divided. The West Indian National Party (WINP), organized in 1942, was supported by black urban laborers and socialist in outlook. It supported immediate self-rule for Trinidad, self-government for the Federation, and nationalization of the oil industry. The Oil Workers Trade Union (OWTU), made up of oil workers, allied itself with the Socialist Party of Trinidad and Tobago. It was opposed to the nationalization of the sugar and oil industries. It lobbied for an improved standard of living for workers. Uriah Butler's supporters ran several candidates as did a United Front coalition of small labor parties.³⁴ The Butlerites won three seats in the 1946b elections, as did the UF. The Socialist Party coalition won two. The final seat was won by an independent candidate. Although representatives of the labour parties won the elections and neither the TLP nor the PDP got any seats, they remained divided in office. Some joined ranks with the moderate or conservative elements in the Legislative Council in order to gain seats in the Executive Council which had more administrative power. These divisions allowed the Governor to maintain his

³²Although the party called itself a "labour" party, it did not represent the majority of black workers on the island. Including the word "labour" in a party name was a common device used by West Indian political parties to attract the workers' vote on all the island

³³Scott B. MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago: Democracy and Development in the Caribbean* (New York: Praeger, 1986), 72-73; Selwyn D. Ryan, *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago: A Study of Decolonization in a Multiracial Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 71-73.

³⁴See Chapter 2 for a discussion of Butler and his political activities.

power with little challenge. The labour element wanted to propose an immediate move to responsible self-government; more conservative elements were led by Albert Gomes; they were willing to accept increased responsibility. Gomes, who supplied the money to publish *The Beacon* in the 1930s and a liberal early in his career, had taken on the role of mediator between business and labor. By 1950 labor leaders believed he was using his position in government to help employers. Gomes introduced a successful motion in the Legislative Council to study the issue of self-government. A committee of elected and nominated legislators plus public figures selected by the government drew up a set of recommendations.³⁵

After much discussion and compromise at home and in Britain, a new Constitution was introduced for Trinidad in 1950. It increased the number of elected members in the Legislative Council to eighteen of the twenty-six. It changed the Executive Council from its advisory role to being the principal instrument of policy. The majority of the Council became elected and the body took over responsibility for government departments, including education and social services; labour, industry and commerce; agriculture, lands, and fisheries; health and local government. Still, the governor retained the right to act independently of the Executive Council, although he seldom exercised that option.³⁶

For the 1950 elections attempts were made to revitalize the TLP, which called for nationalization of lands, mines, minerals, and the means of production, distribution, and

³⁵Colin A. Hughes, "Semi-Responsible Government in the British West Indies," *Political Science Quarterly* 68 (September 1953), 346; MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 74; Ryan, *Race and Nationalism*, 79-85; Ivar Oxaal, *Black Intellectuals Come to Power: The Rise of Creole Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing, 1968), 90.

³⁶Great Britain, British Information Services, *Trinidad and Tobago: The Making of a Nation* (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1962), 8-9; Bridget Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad, 1783-1962* (London: Heinemann, 1981), 197.

communication – it never had much support because the mixed-race, middle-class, white-collar workers it represented were a small group and it failed to attract the interest of black voters; party meetings attracted only two to three hundred people. Although the party platform endorsed socialism, the TLP's goal was to eliminate white, British ownership. The new Caribbean Socialist Party (CSP) had even less support than the TLP. The new Political Progressive Group (PPG) was made up mostly of whites and mixed race moderates. The Butler Party remained a black-East Indian alliance of oil and sugar workers. In 1950, it won six seats on the Executive Council, while the CSP, the TLP, and the PPG each won two. Although it would appear that the Butlerites would take control of the government, the other parties combined to assert some resistance. In fact, from 1950 to 1956, Albert Gomes, of the Political Progressive Group (PPG), served as Minister of Labor, Commerce and Industry in the executive council, making him the leading elected official in the government. He continued to follow a gradual approach to political change, working within the rules set by the colonial government. Other ministers put the goals of their own ministry first. No one took responsibility as a national leader. The government did manage to make some economic progress, though. It introduced a five-year economic program for 1951-55, designed to improve the water supply, education, electricity, agriculture, roads, communications, public buildings, housing, and medical services. Financing came from the local budget, the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund, and a \$28 million loan through Barclay's Bank. It also passed the Pioneer Industries Ordinance of 1952 to promote the growth of industry through special privilege grants, like duty-free imports and tax holidays. Agriculture, though, continued to employ the most people.³⁷

³⁷Ledgister, *Class Alliances*, 104-105; Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 195, 231; Ryan, *Race and*

Trinidad's political parties became more cohesive in the later 1950s with race the dominant organizing principle. Dr. Eric Williams and a group of middle class professionals launched the first permanent political party in 1956, the People's National Movement (PNM), a predominantly but not exclusively black party. Williams had been preparing the people of Trinidad to participate actively in shaping their future through his writing and his involvement with the Political Education Group (PEG) formed in 1950. The PEG emphasized mass political education. He wanted his new party to take the Creole middle class into power, although only the top leadership was middle class. The lower level party activists were mainly lower middle-class blacks. In a speech delivered in 1955, he argued that Trinidad was the sick man of the Caribbean. According to Williams, elected officials were concerned more with pleasing the British, whom he accused of paying lip service only to the idea of free elections. Williams contended that the goal of the British was to maintain their hold on power for as long as possible. He urged Trinidadians to hold their elected officials responsible for their actions. Williams told the people that he had many options for the future, but that he chose to stay in the West Indies with his own people.³⁸

In 1956 the Constitution was amended to create the post of chief minister. The number of elected seats on the Legislative Council increased from eighteen to twenty-four. Two ex officio and five nominated members would serve in the Legislative Council as well. In the general elections that year Williams became the first Chief Minister of the

Nationalism, 87-89.

³⁸Eric Williams earned a Ph.D. from Oxford University. He had taught political science at Howard University and had served for twelve years as a researcher with the Anglo-American Caribbean Economic Commission. Eric Williams, "The Case for Party Politics in Trinidad and Tobago," in Selwyn R. Cudjoe, ed., *Eric Williams Speaks: Essays on Colonialism and Independence* (Wellesley, MA: Calaloux Publications, 1993), 167-204; Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 233-235; Eric Williams, *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago* (New York: Praeger, [1962] 1964), 242-243; Eric Williams, *Inward Hunger: The Education of a Prime Minister* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 144-160.

island; about eighty per cent of the electorate voted in that election. Black and colored residents voted in large numbers for Williams's PNM. The party won thirteen of the twenty-four elected seats in the Legislative Council. The PNM candidates promised to raise living standards by improving social services and developing the economy. They also promised to attract foreign investment by partnering with private enterprise. The remaining seats in the Legislative Council went to several other parties and independent candidates.³⁹

In 1957 the PNM launched its first Five Year Plan. It included subsidies to cane-farmers, peasants, and fishermen; hospital and housing construction; improved roads in agricultural areas; rural electrification; harbor improvements; increased expenditure on education with a goal of achieving free education. To raise the \$191 million (TT) dollars to finance the plan, the government increased taxes on rum, tobacco, gas, automobile licenses, and legal transactions. The major source of revenue, though, was the oil industry. The government intended to renegotiate contracts with the oil companies to secure a fifty-fifty split in oil profits.⁴⁰

After the elections the Trinidad Labour Party, the Political Progressive Group, and the People's Democratic Party merged to form the Democratic Labour Party (DLP), dominated by East Indians who made up about thirty-five per cent of the population by 1958. The party was touted, though, as multiracial and pro-labor. As it continued to define itself, it became clear that more support came from Hindu East Indians and white and Creole conservatives, including Victor Byran, a black, and Albert Gomes, a

³⁹British Information Services, *The Making of a Nation*, 8, 11; Ledgister, *Class Alliances*, 108-109; MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 94, 109; Williams, *History*, 242; Williams, *Inward Hunger*, 161-167.

⁴⁰Ryan, *Race and Nationalism*, 180-181.

Portuguese Creole.⁴¹ The DLP also promised to develop the economy and expand social services. Its candidates backed Trinidad's participation in the Federation. On January 3, 1958, Trinidad joined the other British islands in the Federation of the West Indies.⁴²

In Williams's view the most important impediment to progress in the Caribbean was colonialism. He attacked the DLP for cooperating too closely with the British and trying to hold back social progress. He accused the DLP of supporting colonialism and limiting educational opportunities.⁴³ The PNM, he argued, was committed "to the pursuit of national ends without any special privilege being granted to race, colour, class, creed, national origin, or previous condition of servitude."⁴⁴

The clashes between the PNM and the DLP played upon the already existing racial cleavages in Trinidad. After 1958 open appeals for party support based on race became the major strategy of both parties. Racial divisions would plague Trinidad for years to come. East Indians clung to their separate cultural identity, resisting assimilation into Trinidadian culture even in the twentieth century. Although East Indians and blacks shared a sense of Trinidadian national pride, neither group was inclined to work with the other on any major political issue.⁴⁵

In 1959 Williams decided to extend his challenge to colonial authority to the United States, which had maintained a military base at Chaguaramas since World War II.

⁴¹Although East Indians were represented on several other islands, they were the largest minority component of the population in Trinidad. See, Jesse Harris Proctor, Jr., "East Indians and the Federation of the British West Indies," *Indian Quarterly* 17 (October and December 1961), 370-371.

⁴²British Information Services, *The Making of a Nation*, 8, 11; Ledgister, *Class Alliances*, 108-109.

⁴³Eric Williams, "Massa Day Done," in Selwyn R. Cudjoe, ed., *Eric Williams Speaks: Essays on Colonialism and Independence* (Wellesley, MA: Calaloux Publications, 1993), 237-254.

⁴⁴Williams, "Massa Day Done," 254.

⁴⁵Bridget Brereton, "Society and Culture in the Caribbean: The British and French West Indies, 1870-1980," in Franklin W. Knight and Colin A. Palmer, eds., *The Modern Caribbean* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 97; Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 239; Proctor, "East Indians," 372.

Under the Destroyers-for-Bases Deal between Britain and the United States in 1940, the Americans had given Britain fifty old destroyers in return for ninety-nine-year leases on British bases in the Caribbean and Newfoundland. The United States paid no rent and provided no economic aid to Trinidad, although it was standard policy to do both in countries where the American government maintained bases.⁴⁶ Williams agreed that this was just another form of colonialism at a time when Trinidad was trying to loosen its ties to Britain and gain independence. Williams met with the United States consul general, Edwin Moline, offering to share security duties at the base with the United States and calling for American aid to Trinidad. When the United States failed to act, in April 1960 Williams led a march on the United States consulate in Port of Spain. Several thousand Trinidadians participated in what became known as the March in the Rain. The number of protesters convinced the Americans that Williams had popular support. By February 1961, after three meetings, a new treaty was signed. Some 21,000 acres of Chaguaramas were returned to Trinidad. Teteron Bay remained under American control but was subject to joint lease by the West Indian Federation, Trinidad, and the United States. The Americans agreed to provide economic aid to Trinidad to help improve national communications and Port of Spain's port and to help develop a college of arts and sciences.⁴⁷

Local government in Trinidad was strengthened further in 1959 when the Premier (formerly called the Chief Minister) was given the power to appoint and dismiss ministers. The Executive Council became the Cabinet and the Premier, rather than the Governor, became its presiding officer. Although Britain was represented in the cabinet

⁴⁶Rent and economic assistance went to a number of countries where the United States maintained bases, like Ireland, Morocco, and the Philippines; MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 124.

⁴⁷Williams, *Inward Hunger*, 239-241; Palmer, *Eric Williams*, 76-137.

and Legislative Council by the colonial secretary and the attorney-general, they were no longer allowed to vote in that body.⁴⁸

The main issue that separated the parties in the 1961 elections was the Federation. Once Jamaica said no to participation, Trinidad's decision on whether to remain or not became crucial. Trinidad was the largest and wealthiest remaining island in the Federation. The DLP supported continued participation. It argued that economic necessity, international prestige, common defense, and national unity all remained compelling reasons for Federation. Economically the DLP favored promotion of agriculture over industrial development, because agriculture was still at the heart of the economy.⁴⁹

The PNM campaign stressed the themes of national independence, equality, and interracial solidarity. On the issue of the Federation, Eric Williams argued that there was no such thing. Once Jamaica withdrew, the Federation had ended. The decision on whether or not to form a new one, Williams believed, was best left until after Trinidad's elections in which he preferred to focus on the accomplishments of his government in Trinidad. The PNM took credit for creating new jobs and thirty-two new industries.⁵⁰ Williams attacked white Creoles who tried to preserve the plantation mentality in Trinidad, saying they opposed him and joined the DLP because he was black. He appealed to East Indians, arguing that they had suffered the same degradation at white

⁴⁸British Information Services, *The Making of a Nation*, 9-10.

⁴⁹Ryan, *Race and Nationalism*, 262-263.

⁵⁰They claimed to have created 40,000 new jobs, but failed to mention a concurrent eight percent labor reduction in oil, fifty percent in sugar factories, and twenty percent on sugar estates, mostly due to mechanization. Ryan, *Race and Nationalism*, 271.

hands. He also attacked mixed-race, light-skinned Trinidadians for continuing to ignore the black masses and their needs.⁵¹

When the votes were counted the PNM won twenty of thirty available seats and the DLP only ten. The PNM received fifty-eight percent of the popular vote. The PNM tried to stand by its multiracial campaign promises in staffing the ministries and the Senate. Two Muslims, two people of European descent, and eight blacks, including one woman, got cabinet seats. The PNM filled its twelve Senate vacancies with one Hindu, one Syrian Creole, and one Chinese Creole, seven blacks and two mixed race Trinidadians. The colonial governor appointed three white Creole businessmen and three blacks. Whites, Hindus, and Muslims were all dissatisfied with their representation and blamed the PNM for failing to put multiracialism into practice.⁵²

Almost immediately, Trinidad began working on another new Constitution which the PNM insisted the country needed to bring it into line with the constitutions of Jamaica and Barbados. The government wanted to eliminate the power of the Governor and Crown to disallow laws passed in Trinidad. It also wanted local control of the police and a cabinet-style government. The British agreed on the last two items, but only limited the power of the Governor. His power was to be used only on advice of the Crown, which retained its power to legislate through Orders-in-Council. The 1961 Constitution granted Trinidad and Tobago internal self-government. A bicameral legislature had a nominated Senate of twenty-one members selected by the governor, and an elected House of Representatives of thirty members elected by universal adult suffrage. In the elections of 1961, where racial appeals again took priority over issues and policies, the PNM won

⁵¹Ryan, *Race and Nationalism*, 270-277.

⁵²Ryan, *Race and Nationalism*, 282-291.

fifty-eight per cent of the vote and twenty of the thirty seats in the House. The DLP won the rest. The majority of blacks voted for the PNM candidates; the majority of East Indians voted with the DLP. About eighty-eight per cent of the electorate voted. The election marked the arrival of the PNM as the dominant Trinidadian political party, a position it would hold for many years.⁵³

In conclusion, Trinidad did not develop the stable two-party system that Jamaica enjoyed. Although worker-supported parties dominated the elections, they rarely cooperated when in office. This opened the way for conservatives to wield more power than their numbers would indicate. In Trinidad this situation changed and political stability began to emerge only in the 1950s under the leadership of Eric Williams who founded the PNM in 1956. With a new Constitution that year the PNM came to power. Williams became Chief Minister and later Prime Minister and would dominate island politics for years. He was anti-colonial, determined to end British rule and American influence that it exerted through its occupation of a military base on the island. He introduced economic changes and harbor improvements designed to raise the standard of living. In 1961 Britain granted Trinidad internal self-government within the Federation. In elections held that year the PNM continued its role as the dominant political party.

Barbados

Internal political progress continued in Barbados as well. In 1950 property and income requirements for both voting and House membership were removed and in 1951 universal adult suffrage was introduced, tripling the number of registered voters from 30,000 in 1948 to 100,000 in 1950. In the 1951 elections Grantley Adams and the

⁵³British Information Services, *The Making of a Nation*, 10; British Information Services, *Political Development*, 18; Ledgister, *Class Alliances*, 115; Gordon K. Lewis, "The Trinidad and Tobago General Election of 1961," *Caribbean Studies* 5 (July 1962), 2-4.

Barbados Labour Party (BLP) won eleven seats in the House of Representatives or sixty per cent of the vote. The Electors' Association, which most voters associated with white elites, nominated Ernest Motley, a colored conservative businessman. Although he tried to secure working class votes by donating food and money to urban workers, the Electors' Association won only four seats or thirty per cent of the vote. The Congress Party, a radical workers party suffering internal problems over control, won two seats. In 1954 a semi-cabinet system was established. Under this system the Governor appointed a Premier; the man selected would be the leader of the party that controlled a majority of the House of Representatives. In 1954, that was Grantley Adams. The Governor then appointed ministers to the Cabinet on the advice of the Premier. The system reduced the power of the nominated Legislative Council. The Cabinet became the main source of parliamentary power, with the Governor bound to accept policy decisions made by its members.⁵⁴

In 1955 Errol Barrow, a long-time political activist and former ally of Adams's, left the BLP and formed the Democratic Labour Party (DLP) as a progressive alternative to the BLP. The DLP advocated a socialist response to Grantley Adams's moderate approach to political change.⁵⁵ Barrow came from a black, middle class, plantation owning family. He received the finest education, which included British training in law

⁵⁴Great Britain, Colonial Office, *British Dependencies in the Caribbean and North Atlantic, 1939-1952* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1952), 8-9; Hilary McD. Beckles, *A History of Barbados: From Amerindian Settlement to Nation State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 186-189; Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Barbados, 1960 and 1961* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1962), 120; Hilbourne A. Watson, "Errol Barrow (1920-87): The Social Construction of Colonial and Post-Colonial Charismatic Political Leadership in Barbados," in Anton L. Allahar, ed., *Caribbean Charisma: Reflections on Leadership, Legitimacy and Populist Politics* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2001), 39; J.S.C. Dear, "The Birth of the Constitution," *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 49 (1992), 1; W. Marvin Will, "Insurrection and the Development of Political Institutions: The 1937 Rebellion and the Birth of Labour Parties and Labour Unions in Barbados," *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 49 (1992), 70.

⁵⁵Although political parties on some islands shared the same or similar names, they never worked together.

and economics at the London School of Economics. He was comfortable in any setting in Barbados, though, including the smallest village or the poorest slum. The people accepted him as one of their own, not because he was black, but because he promised to improve their lives.⁵⁶ Barrow's DLP party endorsed minimum government ownership of public utilities. It stressed a government partnership with the private sector rather than state ownership. It criticized Adams and the BLP for failing to support workers, who were still intimidated by employers. It criticized the Barbados Labour Party's lack of a vision for developing the country, which it blamed on Adams's neo-colonialism. Despite such criticisms, in the 1956 general elections the BLP dominated again, winning fifteen seats to the DLP's four. The Progressive Conservative Party, formerly the Electors' Association, won four. The BLP got forty-nine per cent of the vote, the DLP twenty per cent.⁵⁷

In 1958 full Cabinet government began. Government control in internal affairs passed from the Executive Committee under the Governor's leadership to a Cabinet made up of the Premier as chairman and the six members of the Executive Committee appointed by the Governor from the Legislature. In the same year Adams was elected Prime Minister of the Federation and Premier of Barbados. Federal law prohibited him from holding both positions at the same time. In addition, his federal position demanded much of his time to the detriment of government operations in Barbados; those duties fell to his successor Dr. H.G. Cummins, long time BLP operative. When sugar workers demanded higher wages his government failed to support them. The credibility of the BLP suffered because of this and because of internal divisions; many voters believed that

⁵⁶Watson, "Errol Barrow," 33-44.

⁵⁷Colonial Office, *Barbados, 1960 and 1961*, 2; Beckles, *History of Barbados*, 194-198.

Adams still controlled the party and manipulated government policy from behind the scenes. In the election of 1961 Federal responsibilities precluded Adams from campaigning until just before election day. To make matters worse, he had failed to persuade Jamaica to stay in the Federation and Trinidad, too, had announced its intention to leave. His party paid the price for his failures: the BLP won five seats; the DLP won fourteen; and the Barbados National Party (the former Progressive Conservative Party) won four seats. The loss marked the end of Adams's long local political career.⁵⁸

In the 1961 elections Barrow, who first entered politics under Adams's banner and later was a founding member of the DLP in 1955, became premier of Barbados, a post he would hold until 1966. The DLP vowed to move Barbados away from its colonial past and take the country in a new, progressive direction. It proposed an industrial model for development, in contrast to the traditional plantation economy that still dominated the island. It encouraged tourism and independent agriculture in an effort to reduce the island's economic dependence on sugar. The DLP also introduced National Health Insurance and Social Security and expanded free education. Its early successes significantly increased growth of the gross domestic product (GDP). Nationalists, both black and white, hailed Barrow as the leader who had transformed Adams's neo-colonialism into anti-colonialism and nationalism.⁵⁹

Barbados began to make political progress in 1952 with the introduction of universal adult suffrage and the full cabinet government in 1958. The Barbados Labour Party dominated the government in the 1950s until Adams became Prime Minister of the

⁵⁸Colonial Office, *Barbados, 1960 and 1961*, 2, 120; British Information Services, *Political Development*, 17; Beckles, *History of Barbados*, 196-197.

⁵⁹Beckles, *History of Barbados*, 200-202. For specific government programs after the 1961 elections see Chapter 7.

West Indies Federation in 1958. The 1961 elections brought the Democratic Labour Party with Errol Barrow at its head to power. The DLP moved away from support for the British and proposed legislation designed to help workers directly. Economic progress followed; by the early 1960s Barbados's gross domestic product was on the rise.

Economic Growth Stalled

The economic outlook for all the islands improved little in this period. Although the British continued to propose and implement development and welfare projects, there was little actual improvement in the economies of the islands. Guaranteed prices and markets for sugar, citrus, and rice, assured by the British during World War II, continued after the war, resulting in increased security for those producers. As a result, production increased. To encourage the use of idle land, the idea of the long-term leasehold was introduced in Trinidad. Although peasant farmers in the Caribbean preferred to own their own land, the program had some success. Agricultural education increased, but slowly, due to the lack of qualified instructors.⁶⁰

On some islands traditional industries continued to flourish, especially sugar and citrus processing. In addition, the British tried to encourage industrial growth. The Pioneer Industries Law of 1949 in Jamaica, the Trinidad and Tobago Pioneer Industries Ordinance of 1950, and the Pioneer Industries Act of 1951 in Barbados encouraged the growth of business by offering income tax and import duty exemptions to new businesses. In Trinidad over forty new businesses were approved by 1952, including factories making cotton textiles, glass bottles, plastic containers, artificial teeth, and beer.

⁶⁰Colonial Office, *British Dependencies*, 25-28; W. Arthur Lewis, "Colonial Development in British Territories – II," *Caribbean Commission Monthly Information Bulletin* 2 (July 1949), 360.

In Jamaica textile, cement and reinforced concrete factories opened. In Barbados, seven applications were received, but no new businesses emerged in this time period.⁶¹

The tourist trade became of great interest to most islands during the pre-independence years. Jamaica was the only island with an established industry, with 74,892 tourists visiting Jamaica in 1950. By 1954 that number had tripled. Barbados served as a resort for other islanders, but wanted to expand its reach to the United States and Britain. Trinidad's new tourist industry attracted 64,290 visitors in 1950, almost as many as Jamaica.⁶²

Education remained a considerable challenge for the region. Little was done to solve the problems at the lower levels. In 1948, though, the University College of the West Indies opened in Jamaica. The college included an extra-mural department that sent resident tutors to the Leeward Islands, the Windward Islands, Trinidad, and Barbados. During those early years the college prepared students for the examinations of London University, but in the future it expected to gain full independent university status and award its own degrees.⁶³

In spite of efforts by the British and the new local governments, there was little progress economically or socially by 1962. Most farmers still struggled to make a good living. New industries appeared on some island but they were small. Jamaica and Trinidad had thriving tourist industries, but the other islands were just beginning to explore this new avenue. Opportunities for education remained limited. Housing conditions had improved little. Every city still had its barrack-yards. In the 1960s the islands would continue to search for solutions to their problems.

⁶¹Colonial Office, *British Dependencies*, 37-38.

⁶²Colonial Office, *British Dependencies*, 40-41.

⁶³Colonial Office, *British Dependencies*, 54-55.

Federation

At the federal level, by 1961 it was clear that the Federation was in trouble. At a conference held in London in May and June, Trinidad and Tobago emphasized the importance of establishing a strong Federation in which the central government held a great deal of authority. Jamaica, which had prosperous bauxite, manufacturing, and tourist industries, wanted a loose Federation in which the separate territories held most of the responsibility. For a time the islands managed to reach a consensus but they continued to discuss their differences. Britain agreed that the Federation would become independent on May 31, 1962, but local leaders were unable to resolve differences. Grantley Adams was not able to mediate a solution to the issues that divided Jamaica and Trinidad. The Federation was weakened further by the fact that neither Norman Manley of Jamaica nor Eric Williams of Trinidad, two of the most important supporters of federation, had decided to remain active in island politics in 1958 to serve the federal government. Manley told the people of Jamaica that he was committed to the growth and development of Jamaica, although he would continue to support the Federation.⁶⁴

In June 1960, Alexander Bustamante of Jamaica announced that the JLP no longer supported the idea of federation. He argued that Jamaica could deal with its own social and economic problems; it did not need the other islands. Bustamante opposed giving up any powers to the Federal government. Manley called for a vote to decide the issue. The outcome would be crucial to the Federation. No one on the islands or in Britain believed that a West Indian Federation could succeed without Jamaica and Trinidad. In a radio broadcast in June 1960, Manley told the people of Jamaica that the decision of whether or not to remain in the Federation belonged to them. In September

⁶⁴British Information Services, *The Making of a Nation*, 13; Nettleford, *Norman Manley*, 169.

1961 Jamaica held a referendum on its future role in the Federation. A majority of the voters chose to secede because they believed they could gain economic stability and independence from Britain without the Federation. The British government accepted the results. Jamaica withdrew from the Federation and became independent on August 6, 1962.⁶⁵

With Jamaica out, Trinidad was faced with the decision to remain in the Federation or not. With looming economic and financial risks if it tied itself to the remaining small islands, in June 1962 Trinidad issued a resolution announcing that it would seek independence from Britain on its own. It offered the islands in the eastern Caribbean the opportunity to align themselves with Trinidad in a unitary state and promised to continue collaborative efforts with the other islands. Grenada considered the offer, but the smaller islands refused.⁶⁶ They were afraid they would end up as wards of Trinidad, with no real power. As a result of the decisions of Jamaica and Trinidad, Barbados and the Leeward and Windward islands asked Britain to dissolve the West Indies Federation, which ended officially on May 31, 1962.⁶⁷

The failure of the Federation came as no surprise to most observers. The process of establishing the political venture had been fraught with controversy. There was little agreement among the larger islands and the smaller ones on what type of Federation government would be most beneficial. Jamaica and Trinidad, the two largest islands, considered essential to any functioning federal government, disagreed on many issues including the basic structure of the Federation.

⁶⁵British Information Services, *The Making of a Nation*, 13; Ledgister, *Class Alliances*, 52.

⁶⁶See Chapter 7 for details of this discussion.

⁶⁷British Information Services, *The Making of a Nation*, 13; Ledgister, *Class Alliances*, 115; Colin A. Palmer, *Eric Williams and the Making of the Modern Caribbean* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 69.

Conclusion

The late 1940s and 1950s had been years of tremendous political change on the islands. Jamaica, Trinidad, and Barbados had achieved internal self-government and universal adult suffrage. The number of local elected officials had increased. Economically and socially, though, the islands struggled. Even Jamaica, with its bauxite, and Trinidad, with its oil, struggled to supply jobs and social services to the needy. The islands had placed their faith in the West Indies Federation to bring positive change to the region. With the Federation dead, they would have to pursue independence on their own. Jamaica and Trinidad had made significant progress in that direction; Barbados would have to consider its options.

West Indian literature called attention to many of the issues the islands were facing and offered critiques of many of the new political leaders and their policies. Historical novels showed the beginnings of political activism and its affects on the people. Several authors continued to call attention to islanders living in barrack-yards and slums. West Indian writers addressed the place of East Indians in Trinidad. Some explored the challenges West Indians faced when they moved to Britain to escape their lives of poverty on the island or what happened when they did not leave.

CHAPTER V
WEST INDIAN LITERATURE
1947-1962

“Your Roots Are Tapped into the Soil”¹

The 1950s marked the first appearance of the body of work described as West Indian literature. The books published prior to this were a prelude to these novels. By the 1950s authors not only examined the societies from which they emerged, they also began to offer insight into the lives of the people and to criticize the British for the situations in which West Indians found themselves as they began to struggle for independence. A number of events inspired these authors, including the rise of nationalist independence movements on the islands, the West Indian Federation, which united the islands, and the rejection of colonialism. The decade was notable for the number of authors and novels that appeared in just one decade of this time frame – fifty-five novels by twenty different writers between 1949 and 1959.²

The men who wrote these novels came from the same backgrounds as the new political leaders of the 1940s and 1950s. They experienced the same indignities growing up under the British Crown Colony system, including limited educational opportunities and unrestricted access to jobs within the British system. They chose literature, rather

¹Eric Roach, “Letter to Lamming in England,” in Bruce King, ed., *West Indian Literature* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1979), 76.

²Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and its Background* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970), 3; Sandra Pouchet Paquet, “The Fifties,” in Bruce King, ed., *West Indian Literature* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1979), 63.

than politics, as an outlet to express their views. George Lamming may have said it best, “although I would make a distinction about *functions*, I do not make a distinction about *responsibilities*. I do not think that the responsibility of the professional politician is greater than the responsibility of an artist to his society.”³ Lamming believed that the West Indian writer held a responsibility to record and interpret social relations.

In Chapter Five we will look at the reactions of the best known and most widely read of these writers to the same events that caused West Indian politicians to demand more control over the development of their islands.⁴ The novelists chosen to represent the output of West Indian novelists were those whose work was analyzed by post-colonial theorists as they strove to define West Indian literature from a literary perspective. The following chapters will consider their socio-historical contribution to defining a West Indian perspective. Chapter Five will begin with an analysis of Vic

³Ian Munro and Reinhard Sander, “Interview with George Lamming,” *Kas-Kas* (Austin: University of Texas, 1972), 13.

⁴Among the twenty authors included in this first group of West Indian writers are several who will not appear in this study. Jan Carew, Denis Williams, Wilson Harris, O.R. Dathorne, and Edgar Mittelholzer are all from British Guiana, which is outside the scope of this analysis. John Hearne of Jamaica wrote several novels, including *Voices under the Window* and *Stranger at the Gate*, both of which deal with personal relationships and the life of middle class residents of the islands. They did not contribute to an understanding of the independence movement or the history of the majority black population of the islands, though. In 1960 Lamming described Hearne as outside the scope of West Indian literature for just that reason. Hearne’s work sometimes appeared in anthologies that dealt with West Indian literature, but it received less attention than that of the major writers. Hearne was best known as a literary critic. Phyllis Shand Allfrey of Dominica wrote *The Orchid House* in 1953, but it did not receive critical attention until 1970 when Kenneth Ramchand discussed it in *The West Indian Novel and Its Background*. Because her work was little known among West Indian readers, it could not contribute to the development of West Indian literature in the 1950s. Allfrey was best known as a politician in Dominica. Frank Hercules of Trinidad wrote *Where the Hummingbird Flies* (1961), about life in colonial Trinidad in the twentieth century. Hercules had immigrated to the United States in the 1940s; his work attracted no attention in the West Indies. Andrew Salkey of Jamaica wrote two novels, *A Quality of Violence* (1959) and *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* (1960); neither received critical attention in the West Indies. Like Hearne, Salkey was best known as a literary critic. Elaine Campbell, “Phyllis Shand Allfrey,” in Daryl Cumber Dance, ed., *Fifty Caribbean Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 9-11; David Ingledew, “John Hearne,” in Dance, ed., *Fifty Caribbean Writers*, 198-204; Carol P. March, “Frank Hercules,” in Dance, ed., *Fifty Caribbean Writers*, 217-221; Daryl Cumber Dance, “Andrew Salkey,” in Dance, ed., *Fifty Caribbean Writers*, 418-424; Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel*, 225-228; Paquet, “The Fifties,” 63-77; George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, [1960] 1992), 46.

Reid's *New Day*, the novel that critics acknowledge as the beginning of West Indian literature. From there we will consider works by George Lamming, Roger Mais, V.S. Naipaul, and Sam Selvon all of which portray a society living within or just emerging from comprehensive colonial control.

In the 1950s not much had changed for West Indian writers since the early 1940s in respect to publishing venues and audience. A few small publishing houses, like the Pioneer Press of Jamaica founded in 1950, were operating on the islands, but no large publishers had opened for business there. There was still no significant reading public. *BIM*, a new magazine first published in Barbados in 1942, encouraged local writers, as did *Focus*, the Jamaican magazine that published sporadically. By the end of the decade, though, some West Indian authors were being read in Britain as well as in the islands. A 1948 edition of the British literary magazine *Life and Letters*, which published the work of British and colonial writers, included short stories by Lamming, Mais, and Reid and poetry by Lamming and Mais. In the same issue, though, an article concluded that no truly West Indian literature existed yet because with no local publishing companies on the islands, the high rate of illiteracy, and the low pay of workers that prevented them from purchasing books, local authors had to turn to Britain to get their work published. In 1960 George Lamming wrote, "the West Indian of average opportunity and intelligence has not yet been converted to reading as a civilized activity."⁵ For writers the process was complicated by the fact that the themes they explored, denouncing colonialism and calling for independence, were often embarrassing to the British.

⁵Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, 42.

According to Henry Swanzy, director of the BBC's Caribbean Voices program, these problems caused most British publishing houses to reject West Indian works.⁶

At the same time, in an effort to increase literacy rates and the number of readers on the islands, the Extra-Mural Department of the University of the West Indies began a program in 1949 to bring literature to rural inhabitants by using mobile vans that allowed residents to access island libraries. These efforts did not mean a large increase in the reading public, though. When George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* was published in 1953, the lone bookstore in Kingston, Jamaica, ordered only three copies of the book.⁷

The authors who emerged in the 1950s were different from those who preceded them, because they directly challenged the colonial relationship. Men like C.L.R. James, Alfred Mendes, and Claude McKay, writing in the 1930s, had tried simply to inform West Indians about West Indians. They wanted to present a poor, underprivileged class of urban slum-dwellers to the attention of middle-class creoles and whites who were unaware of, or unconcerned with, the lives that the poor lived almost under their noses. By the 1950s, writers had reached the same level of awareness as politicians in the West Indies. Where politicians fought for political independence, novelists wanted to educate

⁶Peter Blackman, "Is There a West Indian Literature?" *Life and Letters* 59 (November 1948): 96-101; George Lamming, "David's Walk," *Life and Letters* 59 (November 1948): 116-121; Roger Mais, "Blackout," *Life and Letters* 59 (November 1948): 161-164; Vic Reid, "Waterfront Bar," *Life and Letters* 59 (November 1948): 165-168; Vic Reid, "Digging Match," *Life and Letters* 59 (November 1948): 169-171; Henry Swanzy, "The Literary Situation in the Contemporary Caribbean," in Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh, eds., *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 249-250.

⁷Swanzy, "The Literary Situation in the Contemporary Caribbean," 249-250; Paquet, "The Fifties," 63.

West Indians about their common culture, the realities of social conditions on the islands, and the role of the British and British attitudes in shaping West Indian society.⁸

Another characteristic of these new novelists was the fact that most of them wrote from exile. Because there were no major publishers and no significant reading public on the islands, the authors believed that they had to attract foreign audiences in order to get published and become successful. They believed that if they were not successful, West Indians would never get their message. As George Lamming wrote in his autobiographical memoir, *The Pleasures of Exile*, each exile from a colonial society “has to win the approval of Headquarters, meaning in the case of the West Indian writer, England.”⁹

Historical Inspiration

Historical fiction was the method Vic Reid used to inspire and inform West Indians. Reid’s *New Day* (1949) was first published novel to be classified as West Indian literature.¹⁰ Reid was born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1913. He graduated from Kingston Technical High School in 1929. After that he worked at a number of different jobs in several countries, including overseer, journalist, editor, and advertising executive, mainly in England, the United States, and Jamaica. He always returned to Jamaica, though, where he spent most of his life. He served in the new governments of Jamaica as chairman of the Jamaica National Trust Commission and later as a trustee of the Historic Foundation Research Centre in Kingston.¹¹

⁸Paquet, “The Fifties,” 64-65.

⁹Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, 24.

¹⁰Vic Reid, *New Day* (Chatham, NJ: The Chatham Bookseller, [1949] 1972). Reid later wrote *The Leopard* (London: Heinemann, 1958), which was set in Africa, and *The Jamaicans* (Kingston, : The Institute of Jamaica, 1976), which was about a slave uprising against the Spanish. In addition, he wrote a number of children’s books.

¹¹Daryl Cumber Dance, “Vic Reid,” in Dance, ed., *Fifty Caribbean Writers*, 377-378.

Reid used a form of Jamaican dialect and a fictional Jamaican family to write a selective political history of Jamaica from the Morant Bay slave rebellion of 1865 to the “new day” that emerged for the island with the 1944 Constitution. George Lamming described Reid’s novel as a key to understanding the literary and social situation in the West Indies because he wrote from a peasant point of view, which introduced the peasant mentality of the West Indies to a larger audience.¹² Reid himself said that he wrote *New Day* because of a need

in my mind to tell the Jamaicans who they are, to remind the Jamaicans who they are, where they come from, to show them that the then self government we were aiming for, the then change in the Constitution that we were getting, was not entirely a gift. The fact is that historically we had paid for it and we had been paying for over three hundred years . . . and therefore they should accept it with pride and work at it with the knowledge that it is theirs as a right.¹³

Reid portrayed his leading characters, the Campbells, as a predominantly light-skinned family of mixed European and African ancestry who are actively involved in the events of both 1865 and 1944. Reid was the first writer to place the ex-slave in a position of influence in shaping the history of Jamaica. Historical accuracy takes a secondary place to the story of the social and historical pressures that shape the evolution of Jamaican society. According to Reid

I have not by any means attempted a history of the period from 1865 to 1944. The entire Campbell family of narrative is fictional. What I have attempted is to transfer to paper some of the beauty, kindness, and humor of my people, weaving characters into the wider framework of

¹²George Lamming, “The Peasant Roots of the West Indian Novel,” in Edward Baugh, ed., *Critics on Caribbean Literature* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1978), 25.

¹³Daryl Cumber Dance, *New World Adams: Conversations with Contemporary West Indian Writers* (Leeds, Yorkshire, England: Pupal Tree Books, [1984] 1992), 207.

these eighty years and creating a tale that will offer as true an impression as fiction can of the way by which Jamaica and its people came to today.¹⁴

At the opening of the novel in 1865, Jamaica is in financial chaos. The end of slavery has crippled financially most planters, because slaves prefer to work small subsistence plots rather than stay on plantations. This is the beginning of an independent spirit that keeps black peasants working small independent plots of land rather than relying on British owners for survival. In addition, three years of severe drought have worsened conditions. Many Jamaicans blame the British government, especially Governor John Eyre, the Royal Governor of Jamaica, who claims that blacks suffer more than whites because they are too lazy to work. When the government fails to respond to their demands for assistance they begin a black uprising against white minority oppression, the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865..¹⁵

Davie Campbell, a young agitator representative of the masses, explains the situation.

When slavery was run out of the country, *buckra* English promised the poor land and wages. They gave the land, but all rocks and swamps, and nothing will grow there. They gave the wages, but man can no' live on sixpence a day . . . Is true it, that our family are no' badly off, for nearwhite we are, even if poor, and ha' been landowners for three generations . . . But no'-the-less . . . we are all Jamaicans.¹⁶

At first, the Campbell family is divided on how to respond to their plight. Pa John Campbell works as a manager on a plantation. He is not inclined to support radical change that might jeopardize the position of his family in society. The youngest

¹⁴Reid, *New Day*, viii.

¹⁵Reid, *New Day*, viii, 9-10.

¹⁶Reid, *New Day*, 25.

Campbell child, Bro John, is torn between loyalty to his father and his brother, Davie, a supporter of the uprising. As Bro John steals away from school to see what will happen to Davie after he is arrested, he overhears the teacher beginning a history lesson that exemplified the control the British exercise over Jamaicans.

If the People of the United States of America had obeyed the dictates of His Gracious Majesty King George III, today they would still be children of the Mother Country enjoying the wonderful privilege and safety which lies in being a member of the vast British Empire. There would have been peaceful emancipation of their slaves, with the Mother Country, in her beneficence, providing millions of pounds compensation to owners, as was done in these colonies. There would not have been this disastrous Civil War, which has most certainly wrecked the future of America. For never again will there be complete peace between North and South.¹⁷

Bro John displays no reaction to a less with which he is familiar.

The agitators approach Morant Bay with only sticks, stones, and a handful of weapons, but the police open fire on them. When the British decide to use violence against peaceful demonstrators, even Pa Campbell is outraged. He never condoned a violent uprising, but he cannot support the British actions either. He tries to reach a compromise, but the British associate him with the troublemakers and kill him. Davie and Bro John, who witness their father's death, manage to escape, while the Morant Bay uprising ends in more violence and retribution on the part of the British.¹⁸ Over the years John Campbell prospers in the shipping business. He raises Davie's grandson, Garth, after his parents die. He sends the child to England for an education. When he returns to

¹⁷Reid, *New Day*, 81-82.

¹⁸In the actual Morant Bay rebellion twenty-nine whites dies and thirty-four were injured. The official record listed three hundred fifty-four people executed for the uprising. Even the British criticized Governor Eyre for using excessive retaliatory measures. The next year Jamaica was made a Crown Colony so control came directly from British, not local, authorities. See Chapter 2 for details of the rebellion.

Jamaica Garth wants to know about the events that took place at Morant Bay. John explains,

If [we] did wrong, it was because the times we lived in were no' right . . . Worse was the poverty then than now, with hunger riding men for three years. But, right or wrong, no good come of it. Secession was what [we] asked for – and what [we] got? Constitution taken away and the Crown a-rule from Whitehall. And that happened 'cause we went too far too quick.¹⁹

Garth becomes an activist, fighting to improve the plight of the working peasant. He helps form a union and demands higher pay for workers. When his efforts fail, he organizes a strike, which turns violent when owners try to force workers back to the job. Garth responds, “Unionism will come to our island because it has come to almost every other part of the globe. Modern conditions demand it. The old days of benevolent master and dependent servants are passed.”²⁰ The union remains in operation; the workers receive raises. A new union leader organizes city workers, while Garth goes on to found a political party. When the Royal Commission comes to investigate the strikes that are occurring throughout the Caribbean in the late 1930s, Garth testifies about conditions in Jamaica. The party begins to demand adult suffrage, a new constitution, and self-government. The novel ends on the day Jamaica gets its new constitution in 1944. John and Garth stand proudly on the platform with the British dignitaries.

As Reid himself said, he wanted to show the Jamaican people that they had earned their right to independence. He took the best-known black Jamaican revolution of the nineteenth century and connected it to the 1944 Constitution. After the Morant Bay Rebellion failed, many of those who participated in it fled to the hills and continued to

¹⁹Reid, *New Day*, 277.

²⁰Reid, *New Day*, 333-334.

fight and lobby for their rights.²¹ Reid's fictional family, who he said was loosely based on his own family history, continued to move forward in the business and political world of Jamaica into the twentieth century. Garth represented a generation of young Jamaicans who went to England for an education and came back questioning British authority, men like Norman Manley of Jamaica. Garth returned to a Jamaica that would have been familiar to those who lobbied for their rights in the 1930s. The population suffered from extreme poverty and a lack of economic and political power to change the situation. Garth organized workers to strike, just as Alexander Bustamante did in 1930s Jamaica. Garth testified before the Royal Commission investigating conditions on the islands, like Manley did. Garth then formed a political party, like Bustamante and Manley, and like Manley, he worked to get a new Constitution in 1944. Reid aimed to show that he believed the Constitution was the achievement that the Jamaican people had fought to reach for almost a century, not something the British gave them.

Although later generations have judged *New Day* as the first West Indian novel, Reid acknowledged that it might not have been published precisely because it was about Jamaica. In an interview in 1979 Reid said, "You find that . . . if you know a work is good and that you know it is right for your country . . . but because it wouldn't probably sell a hell of a lot in America or England that they wouldn't touch it, you know."²² He explained that his book was published because Alfred Knopf saw Reid's short story in *Life and Letters* and wrote to him asking if he had a book. Reid believed that Knopf was intrigued because the subject matter and language were new and different. Still, Reid's novel attracted little attention when it was published for the first time in the United

²¹For details of the Morant Bay Rebellion, see Chapter 1.

²²Dance, *New World Adams*, 215.

States. One lone reviewer, the innovative black writer Zora Neale Hurston, praised Reid's use of dialect to emphasize his characters' Jamaican origin. She made no attempt to place the book within an historical perspective or relate it to current events in Jamaica.²³ Although Reid's book received little critical attention at the time it was published, his cultural work for both the Bustamante and Manley governments showed these political leaders were aware of his talent.

Reid was the only major novelist of the period to rely so heavily on the historical context of events. George Lamming, for example, situated his characters in the midst of recent historical events, but his purpose was not to have them move or shape those events. Instead Lamming wanted to show the effect of events on the people of the Caribbean.

George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953) dealt with the strikes of the late 1930s in Barbados and the changes they brought to organized labor and society in general.²⁴ Lamming was born in Barbados in 1927 where he lived until he finished his education. He attended Combermere High School on one of the few scholarships available to study there. In 1946 he moved to Trinidad to teach. From late 1947 his poetry and short prose pieces were broadcast to the islands over the BBC's new Caribbean Voices series, which accepted the work of Caribbean writers and poets and broadcast it back to the islands. From there his work appeared in British literary magazines, like *Life and Letters*. Much of his early work dealt with themes that would later appear in his novels, like his frustration with West Indian cultural life and the

²³Zora Neale Hurston, "At the Sound of the Conch Shell," *New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review*, March 20, 1949, 4; Dance, *New World Adams*, 215.

²⁴George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, [1953] 1991).

problems of the artist in island society. Lamming left Trinidad for England in 1950 to pursue a writing career. It was his experience as a black West Indian in unfriendly London that also served to define the novels he wrote and caused him to begin to see himself as a West Indian. In addition to his writing, from 1950 to 1962, Lamming produced programs for the BBC's overseas service.²⁵

In the Castle of My Skin details the disruption of life in a village close to Bridgetown, Barbados, called Creighton's village after the white landowner. It is Lamming's most autobiographical novel. The main character G. is a nine-year-old boy whose life we follow until he leaves Trinidad at age eighteen, viewing the changes in the village during those years through his eyes. What separates G. from his friends is his mother's desire to see him get a good education.

As the novel opens in the 1930s the village is united by common values, an attachment to the land, and its faith in the landlord, whose house stands on a hill and dominates the village below. The people of the village accept their situation without question. They are taught from an early age that the British are superior and their own local history unimportant. G. thought, "They had read about the Battle of Hastings and William the Conqueror. That happened so many hundred years ago. And slavery was thousands of years before that. It was too far back for anyone to worry about teaching it as history. That's really why it wasn't taught."²⁶

The pivotal choice for the villagers is whether or not to go on strike against a shipping company owned by Creighton. Mr. Slime, a dismissed schoolteacher, becomes the trade union head and leader of the colonial revolt. Although he is considered part of

²⁵Ian Munro, "George Lamming," in King, ed., *West Indian Literature*, 126-127; Ian Munro, "George Lamming," in Dance, ed., *Fifty Caribbean Writers*, 264-265.

²⁶Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*, 58.

the elite, the only class educated enough to articulate goals, the villagers trust him because he is a local. He tells them that theirs will be one of a series of strikes going on throughout the West Indies. Slime promises them a new life. According to Pa, the village patriarch, Slime “speak the other night how he goin’ to make us owners o’ this land . . . I couldn’t sort of catch my breath, when I hear it, but ‘tis a big thing to expect.”²⁷ Villagers begin to look at Creighton differently, as though he might not be entitled to own the whole village. Some villagers begin to think about how he depends upon them for labor to make his profit. Ma, a local who tends to sympathize with Creighton, even apologizes for the discontent in the village, but Pa points out

I ain’t know exact, Ma, an’ Mr. Slime never so much as say except that he feel that you an’ all the rest who been here donkeys years ‘tis time that we own it. If Mr. Creighton an’ all the Creightons from time past can own it, there ain’t no reason why we mustn’t.²⁸

Even though the villagers know little about the actual strike, which is led by urban workers, they accept Slime’s opinion that it was safe to join. They decide to strike.

The strike impacts the village directly. The school closes for the day. Trade and work stop. The villagers hear rumors about fighting in town. “In the houses they tried to imagine what the fighting was like . . . the incidents in the city were simply beyond them. There was fighting in the city. That was all they were told.”²⁹ A series of events culminate in an invasion of the village by city workers determined to kill the landlord. Instead, Mr. Slime saves him and becomes the new political power.

Nothing changes immediately as a result of the strikes. G. enters high school in the city, leaving most of his friends behind. One of them, Trumper, goes to the United

²⁷Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*, 79.

²⁸Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*, 87.

²⁹Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*, 191.

States, but eventually, the village, too, is uprooted, with Creighton forced to leave his estate. His land is sold to the Penny Bank and the Friendly Society; Slime had urged villagers to contribute to both. The people with the most shares get first choice in the purchase of land, though; they are doctors, lawyers, teachers, and politicians. The villagers are dispossessed, including the shoemaker who had defended the changes believing they would not affect him. He reacts when a black man tells him he has to leave his home and his business.

Tell me, what part o' nancy story you tell me 'bout you buy this lan'; how the bloody hell you can buy this, who sell it to you, where you get money to buy it from, since when you an' a white landlord is friends for him to call you in secret and sell you a spot o' land that I been on for only God knows how long. This ol' shop been here for more'n twenty years.³⁰

By this time G. has finished his high school education and is ready to leave the village, to which he now seems no longer to belong. Just before he departs for his new life as a teacher in Trinidad, he runs into his old friend Trumper who has returned from the United States. Trumper talks to G. about black pride and the struggle for political rights going on in the States. Trumper declares "I am going to fight for the rights of negroes, and I'll die fighting."³¹ The ideas are almost incomprehensible to G. at the time. He is still very much the product of his colonial upbringing; in his heart he is British.

Lamming's book was based on his own boyhood in Barbados. In a 1979 interview he said that his mother could identify all the characters and relate what had happened to them.³² For Lamming the book was an attack against British colonial rule. It portrayed a society very much like the one described in the Moyne Commission

³⁰Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*, 234.

³¹Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*, 297.

³²Dance, *New World Adams*, 139.

report.³³ Lamming's story revolved around life in a typical Barbadian village in the 1930s. In the course of the narrative he called attention to a number of issues that he considered crucial to understanding the mentality of the West Indian people. One of these was the control exercised by the British landowners. Lamming's village was under the leadership of the major landowner; this was a situation that existed on all British West Indian islands because they had developed under the plantation system. When slavery ended, the white population continued to control most of the land, leaving the villagers dependent, for at least part of their employment, upon the principal landowner, who was always British like Creighton. It was a system that existed well into the twentieth century. Lamming showed that it created a system where the local population relied on someone to help them survive. First it was the British, in the form of Creighton; later it was the new political activists, like Mr. Slime, who represented the new local leadership on the island.

The educational system in the Barbados of Lamming's youth also contributed to this sense of dependence; in addition it created a population unsure of their identity. Lamming's concern about education reflected the views of Manley's People's National Party in Jamaica and Eric Williams's People's National Movement in Trinidad, both of which sought increased educational opportunities that would lead to a better informed electorate. Lamming showed that children in Barbados were taught British history and read British literature. Lamming recounted G.'s certainty that there was no need to teach the history of slavery because it had happened so many years ago and certainly not in Barbados. He grew up believing that all things English were good and that he himself was English. G. knew that his future was England. Although the novel does not follow

³³For details of the Moyne Commission report, see Chapter 4.

G's career beyond Barbados, Lamming, of course, found that in England he was not English.

Lamming dealt with the riots of 1938 from the perspective of the village, but again reinforced the idea that the villagers were not prepared to rely on their own instincts. The inhabitants were astonished just to think such a thing as a riot against the British could happen. Some began to think in terms of new freedom, particularly freedom from Creighton. Some, like Ma, defended the landowner who had taken care of them over the years. This mixed reaction to events will appear in later novels as well; people wanted change, but at the same time they feared the loss of the protection they believe they might still need.³⁴ When the villagers decided to support the strike on the advice of a new local leader, Mr. Slime, they found they had been betrayed by him, the intellectual they trusted most. Lamming was the first, but by no means the last, to criticize local middle-class, black leaders for their failure to follow through on the promises they made as labor organizers and politicians running for office. For instance, in 1953 Trinidad was dominated by a maze of political parties all trying to get elected. It was apparent already that some, like Albert Gomes, became more conservative, more reliant on the British, when they attained office.³⁵ The reality on the islands was that as life improved, it did so mostly for the middle class. The majority black population continued to work for low wages; peasants continued to struggle for survival in the villages, where many of them remained dependent on the local sugar estate for employment.

³⁴See, for example, Austin Clarke's *Survivors of the Crossing*, in Chapter 9.

³⁵See Chapter 4 for details of Trinidad's complicated political situation in the 1940s and early 1950s.

Lamming's book received more contemporary attention than that of Reid. Reviews of *In the Castle of My Skin* praised Lamming's efforts to bring to life a generation emerging from colonialism. In a *Saturday Review* article, Harvey Curtis Webster called the book "highly rewarding both as a social and as a personal document."³⁶ Webster argued that in the book G. became aware of the possibilities open to the black population of Barbados. He described G. as starting life as a serf of Creighton, a kindly owner, then proceeding to a point where he came to believe that the political and economic changes that were occurring would lead to a new existence for everyone. For Mr. Slime the change was negative; he went from a defender of the people to a successful exploiter. G. was transformed from a product of slavery to a young man who believed that skin color was no longer important. Only Ma and Pa continued to accept that change came only through the will of God and the white man.³⁷ An unnamed reviewer in *Time* described life in Creighton Village as primitive. He called *In the Castle of My Skin* "a curious mixture of autobiography and a poetic evocation of a native life that has changed in the author's brief lifetime from careless, laughing simplicity to uneasy social awareness."³⁸ He pointed out that what young G. experienced was a cross-section of island life in his generation, including native agitators engineering strikes, native villagers dispossessed of land they had lived on for their entire lives, and agitators selling out the local black population who had been taken in by their revolutionary talk. He concluded by saying that "*In the Castle of My Skin* should make instructive reading for colonial administrators."³⁹ The reception Lamming's first book received, combined

³⁶Harvey Curtis Webster, "The Hills of Color," *Saturday Review* 36 (December 5, 1953): 36.

³⁷Webster, "The Hills, of Color," 36.

³⁸"In Between Is Brown," *Time* 62 (November 9, 1953): 116.

³⁹"In Between Is Brown," 118.

with his work for the BBC, ensured that West Indians back home were aware of his views, particularly educated West Indians who maintained some contact with Britain.

Lamming was a regular contributor to the BBC's Caribbean Voices program.

Barrack-Yard and Slum Stories

Other writers of this period chose to focus on portraying life as it existed on the islands, much as the authors of the 1930s had. Roger Mais, for example, described a barrack-yard in Kingston, Jamaica, that C.L.R. James would have recognized, but Mais contrasted the bleakness of the yard to the beauty of the surrounding hills. V.S. Naipaul described the inhabitants of a street in Port of Spain, Trinidad, focusing on the lack of opportunity available to the residents.

Mais's *The Hills Were Joyful Together* (1953) is set in a Kingston, Jamaica, barrack-yard.⁴⁰ Mais was born in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1905 into a fair-skinned, middle-class family. He worked at a number of jobs, including reporter for the *Daily Gleaner*, the local newspaper, garden columnist for the *Jamaica Mail*, another local newspaper, insurance salesman, overseer on a banana plantation, and writer for *Public Opinion*, the political and current affairs journal for the People's National Party of Norman Manley. He adopted the PNP's idea of socialism, i.e., he became an intellectual committed to the cause of social justice. In 1944, the British imprisoned him for six months for writing a critical response to Winston's Churchill's warning that colonial participation in the war effort would not result in independence for the colonies. In 1952 he left Jamaica for London. He returned in 1954 because of illness; a year later he died of cancer.⁴¹ Mais

⁴⁰Roger Mais, *The Hills Were Joyful Together* (London: Heinemann, [1953] 1981).

⁴¹Edward Braithwaite, "Introduction," to Roger Mais, *Brother Man* (London: Heinemann, [1954] 1974), v-viii; Kenneth Ramchand, "Introduction," to Roger Mais, *Listen, the Wind* (London: Longman, 1986), ix; Daphne Morris, "Roger Mais," in Dance, ed., *Fifty Caribbean Writers*, 303-305; Karina

was the only one of this initial group of writers to be influenced not just by his childhood as a colonial subject but by his political activism as well.

In *The Hills Were Joyful Together*, Mais describes the yard as full of people living in poverty with little hope for the future. Mais contrasts the poverty of the yard though, with the green hills and beautiful mountains that rise above Kingston, where an unspecified religious group holds their services. Although two of the women who attend regular services live in the yard, the hope their religious movement offers for the future seldom touches their neighbors.

There is no clear plot to Mais's novel. He provides no extended portraits of the characters. They are just a group of people struggling to survive in terrible conditions. The novel opens in a barrack-yard in Kingston, where Mais introduces the characters. Zephyr is a prostitute and the most financially secure of the inhabitants. Ras, who finds a goat in a nearby gully, butchers it and sells it to the people in the yard; he is elated at the unexpected income. Charlotte, who has come from the country, and Papa Bedosa, who constantly bullies her, remain together because they need to rely on each other to survive. Surjoe makes his money by betting on horse races. Rema, his woman, works in a cigar factory, but has to cater to Surjoe when she gets home.

Almost the entire novel takes place in the yard where Mais details the interactions among these characters. It is hard to hide anything that goes on there. Life is violent. Manny, who seems to have nothing to do most of the time, likes to harass people. He steals Pattoo's knife and dares him to try and take it back. "Manny grinned harder, watching [Pattoo] warily, waited with a mounting kind of exhilaration, enjoying in

Williamson, "Roger Mais: West Indian Novelist," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 2 (December 1966): 138.

anticipation beating up the other boy to a pulp with his fists.”⁴² When they do fight, Pattoo wins and then helps Manny bind his wounds, an action typical of the yard. Although violence erupts on a daily basis, it is almost immediately forgotten.

Personal relationships often are fleeting, though. Men treat women as servants, but when one man leaves, a woman believes she needs a new one to support her. Euphemia lives with Shag, but when he is away Bajun Man keeps her company and gives her money. When Shag catches her with Bajun Man, he leaves. Euphemia comments, “What a hell of a mixed-up business life is, anyway.”⁴³ Then Bajun Man leaves too. In the end Shag believes she has betrayed him and kills her brutally, with a machete, while the yard looks on in horror.

Surjoe is arrested for robbery and sent to prison. There he is beaten regularly by the guards, without mercy, but he will not name the accomplice to his crime. One day the chaplain sums up Surjoe’s plight and that of the yard inhabitants in general: “what happen to people when their lives are constricted and dwarfed and girdled with poverty . . . things like that and that and that come out of it . . . moral deformity, degradation, disease.”⁴⁴ He later adds, “we make criminals out of men and women and children in the kind of society we are satisfied to put up with.”⁴⁵ The novel ends with Surjoe trying to escape from jail. As he climbs the last wall to freedom, a guard shoots him, “and that was all.”⁴⁶ The two sisters who attend regular religious services provide the only hope in the novel by escaping the yard, however briefly, to go to the hills to attend services. They are minor characters, though. Most of the other inhabitants of the yard just leave them alone.

⁴² Mais, *The Hills Were Joyful Together*, 114.

⁴³ Mais, *The Hills*, 132.

⁴⁴ Mais, *The Hills*, 197.

⁴⁵ Mais, *The Hills*, 238.

⁴⁶ Mais, *The Hills*, 288.

The only active participation of the sisters in the events of the yard is their presence at the memorial for Euphemia.

Mais's goal was to expose Jamaica's slum life to the world. It was the riots of 1938 that convinced him that he needed to bring the realities of life for the majority of the population of Kingston to public attention. Through his activity with the People's National Movement he realized that the barrack-yard poor were being left out of the labor movement because most of them simply survived; they had no real job. Improved wages and working conditions would do nothing to help them. In *The Hills Were Joyful Together* he set out to describe the poorest of the poor and their daily existence. The book was just a series of episodes in which the people of the yard interacted with each other and with the outside world. His portrayal of the yard differed from C.L.R. James's mostly in terms of the raw violence and brutality that Mais displayed.⁴⁷ He relied on his own personal experience for just one small part of the book, the jail experience of Surjoe. Although Mais himself was not treated badly while he served his prison time, he saw other prisoners suffer the daily degradation that he brought to life in Surjoe's experience.

In 1954 Mais published *Brother Man*, a novel also set in a Kingston slum.⁴⁸ This time the lead character is a Rastafarian, a member of a minority religious group that is anti-British and focuses on looking for its black roots in Africa. The Rastafarians date their founding from the 1930 coronation of the Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia, the former Ras (Prince) Tafari. Both the British and the new governments that succeeded them in Jamaica treat the Rastafarians as second-class citizens functioning outside the

⁴⁷For James's barrack-yard stories, see Chapter 3.

⁴⁸Roger Mais, *Brother Man* (London: Heinemann, [1954] 1974).

mainstream society. Rastafarians are associated with drug use, criminal activity, and violence.

The tongues in the lane clack-clack almost continuously, going up and down the full scale of human emotions, human folly, ignorance, suffering, viciousness, magnanimity, weakness, greatness, littleness, insufficiency, frailty, strength. They clack on street corners [and] under the shadow of overhanging buildings that lean precariously, teetering across the dingy chasm of the narrow lane.⁴⁹

Mais, though, presents Brother Man as a healing force in a depressed community.

Brother Man lives in this poor neighborhood where he earns his living as a cobbler. His fame comes because people believe he is a healer.

Brother Man belonged to that cult known as the Ras Tafari, and some people said he was mad. Others again thought he was a holyman and a healer, and many come to him, secretly, because they feared gossip, to heal their sick, and for advice and encouragement when things were going wrong.⁵⁰

Minette, a young girl from the country who had come to Kingston to earn money, is rescued by Brother Man. Most girls like her find themselves being kept by some man. In Brother Man's house, she cooks and cleans for him, but sleeps in the kitchen. According to Minette, Brother Man, "had given her more than anybody in the world had ever given her. He had given her self-respect, and a purpose for living."⁵¹ She will remain loyal to him to the end.

Most of the people on the street earn just enough to live. Papacita "had a saying, work never made a man rich, man was a fool to work."⁵² It is an attitude that is prevalent on the street; it closely mirrors the attitudes of the characters that Naipaul presents in

⁴⁹Mais, *Brother Man*, 7.

⁵⁰Mais, *Brother Man*, 22-23.

⁵¹Mais, *Brother Man*, 33.

⁵²Mais, *Brother Man*, 43.

Miguel Street and Mais writes about in *The Hills Were Joyful Together*. The poor do not hold jobs; they survive. Papacita survives by passing counterfeit money. When his girlfriend, Girlie, asks him why he does not work, he explains, “Every man had to scuffle for himself – that was the law of existence as he knew it. It was a simple matter of individual survival, each man for himself.”⁵³ When he and Girlie split up, she wants revenge; she also wants another man to support her. That is how life works in their community.

Jesmina supports her sister Cordelia and Cordelia’s sick son Tad, whom Brother Man can not heal. Cordelia blames Brother Man for his failure and vows to get even. She plants counterfeit coins she has gotten from Papacita in Brother Man’s house. The police arrest him. The people of the street, led by Jesmina and Minette, come to his rescue. Papacita even bails him out of jail. “People stopped and greeted him and expressed their sympathy for him, and their disgust at the length the police would go when things were bad with them and they wanted to make a case.”⁵⁴

About the same time as the arrest, a young couple on the beach is attacked by a bearded man. People immediately change their attitudes and begin avoiding Brother Man. They believe that the attacker with the beard must be a member of the Rastas.

About three days after the Palisades incident a wave of resentment swept through the city. It was directed against all bearded men. The leading newspapers played up the angle that a community of bearded men in their midst, formed together into a secret cult, was a menace to public safety.⁵⁵

⁵³Mais, *Brother Man*, 43.

⁵⁴Mais, *Brother Man*, 170.

⁵⁵Mais, *Brother Man*, 173.

Politicians and the press take advantage of an opportunity to spread resentment and hostility against this minority group. For Brother Man, “the counterfeiting charge coupled with the general prejudice against bearded men was too much . . . One by one his followers, those whom he had helped, and succoured, and who had faith in him, fell away.”⁵⁶ Only Jesmina and Minette continue to support him. One night when he goes for a walk a crowd attacks him. It is three days before he wakes up. Minette is there. “She told him then how one by one the neighbours had dropped in to ask after him.”⁵⁷ Brother Man’s spirit is renewed, but Rastafarians continue to be persecuted in Jamaica for many years.

Once again, Mais presented a picture of urban life in Kingston, this time outside of the barrack-yard, on a street in a poor section of town, not unlike Naipaul’s Miguel Street. Although Brother Man was respected by his neighbors, his friends abandoned him when the police implicated the Rastafarians in the attack on the young couple. The police had no evidence that a Rastafarian committed the crime; their response reflected the bad feelings that existed between the police and the religious group. Mais tried to show that at least one of them, Brother Man, deserved some respect. In a 1979 interview, another West Indian author from Jamaica, Vic Reid, recalled being involved in a government mission to Africa led by Norman Manley. The goal of the mission was to explore the possibility of returning some Rastafarians to the roots of their cultural heritage in Ethiopia. Unfortunately, the men found that they were foreigners in Africa. Manley’s attention, though, began to increase the level of respect the group attained.

⁵⁶Mais, *Brother Man*, 174.

⁵⁷Mais, *Brother Man*, 190.

Mais's novel was intended, once again, to bring positive attention to an element of Jamaican society often overlooked by the government.

In 1959 V.S. Naipaul's *Miguel Street* portrayed street life in Trinidad from a different perspective from Mais's.⁵⁸ Naipaul was born into an East Indian family in Trinidad in 1932. He attended Queens Royal College and the University College, Oxford, on a scholarship. After earning a degree in English he worked as an editor for the BBC program *Caribbean Voices* and as a reviewer for the *New Statesman*. Naipaul returned to Trinidad for short visits, but spent most of the rest of his life in England.⁵⁹ In 1958 Naipaul talked about his determination to leave Trinidad. He described the country as "a simple colonial philistine society [where] education is desirable because it may lead to security, but any unnecessary acquaintance with books is frowned upon. The writer or the painter, unless he wins recognition overseas, preferably in England, is mercilessly ridiculed."⁶⁰ In his writing, Naipaul focused on the lives of East Indians in Trinidad. He spent his early years living in a closed Indian society on what he described as "a small plantation society in the New World."⁶¹ The family moved to Port of Spain when his father got a job on a local newspaper. He described his life there:

In the city we were in a kind of limbo. There were few Indians there, and no one like us on the street. Though everything was very close, and houses were open to every kind of noise, and no one could really be private in his yard, we continued to live in our old enclosed way, mentally separate from the more colonial, more racially mixed life around us. . . . I never ceased to feel a stranger.⁶²

⁵⁸V.S. Naipaul, *Miguel Street* (London: Heinemann, [1959] 1974).

⁵⁹Robert D. Hamner, ed., *Critical Perspectives on V.S. Naipaul* (Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1977), xv.

⁶⁰V.S. Naipaul, "London," *The Times Literary Supplement* (August 15, 1958): 20.

⁶¹V.S. Naipaul, *Reading and Writing: A Personal Account* (New York: New York Review Books, 2000), 10.

⁶²Naipaul, *Reading and Writing*, 14.

Amon Saba Saakana described Naipaul as famous primarily “because of the role he played for white western societies in satirising, ridiculing, and condemning both the Caribbean and Africa as ‘barren societies.’”⁶³ Naipaul grew up in an Indian culture that was being transformed by interaction with the black majority in Trinidad. He escaped to England but was never comfortable there. Saakana believed that Trinidad haunted him.⁶⁴

Dolly Hassan, on the other hand, argued that Naipaul was “an honest commentator upon a tenuously rooted colonial society.”⁶⁵ She grew up in a former British colony, Guyana, in the 1960s and stated that Naipaul’s stories reflected a society that was familiar to her. “Naipaul does not romanticize the region, nor does he present a cosmetic view of it. Instead, he boldly confronts issues we are happy to see faced.”⁶⁶ Naipaul described his work as an attempt to see “ourselves as others see us.”⁶⁷ *Miguel Street* represented that attempt. The novel was based on characters the author remembered from his childhood.

Miguel Street is comprised of a series of short stories narrated by a young boy who describes life as he perceives it on one street in Port of Spain, Trinidad in the 1940s. The people he portrays live on the fringes of society, sometimes eccentric, sometimes violent, and always guided by the lies they tell. Man-Man, one of the most eccentric characters, pretends to be a new messiah who wants to die a martyr, but when people try to stone him he shouts, “Cut this stupidity out!”⁶⁸ Bogart falls under the spell of the Americans who pour into Trinidad during World War II. He takes his nickname and his

⁶³Saakana, *Colonial Legacy*, 90.

⁶⁴Saakana, *Colonial Legacy*, 90-95.

⁶⁵Dolly Zulakha Hassan, *V.S. Naipaul and the West Indies* (New York: Peter Long, 1989), 2.

⁶⁶Hassan, *V.S. Naipaul*, xii.

⁶⁷Feroza Jussawalla, ed., *Conversations with V.S. Naipaul* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), xiv.

⁶⁸Naipaul, *Miguel Street*, 38.

attitude from the film *Casablanca*. We never know his real name. When he is arrested for bigamy the entire street is shocked. They did not even know he was married.

Naipaul also introduces Popo, a carpenter, who is always busy hammering and sawing, but the only thing he “ever built was the little galvanized-iron workshop under the mango tree at the back of his yard. And even that he didn’t quite finish. He couldn’t be bothered to nail on the sheets of galvanized-iron for the roof, and kept them weighted down with huge stones.”⁶⁹ Popo eventually goes to jail for stealing furniture and selling it.

Eddoes, a Hindu, drives a scavenging-cart. The carts come early in the morning to clean the streets. “There was a glamour to driving the blue carts. The men were aristocrats. They worked early in the morning, and had the rest of the day free.”⁷⁰ The residents of Miguel Street admire Eddoes for the things he collects on the job – a bed, cups and saucers “only slightly cracked,” wood, bolts, screws, and sometimes money.⁷¹ Eddoes is proud of his work and generally looked up to on Miguel Street.

Bolo is a retired barber who lives on a small old-age pension. He refuses to trust anything he reads in the newspaper. He does not believe World War II is over until 1947; he says, “Is only a lot of propaganda. Just lies for black people.”⁷² After he retires he begins buying sweepstakes tickets; the young narrator of the novel checks the newspaper to see if Bolo wins. When he does, though, he refuses to believe it. “These Trinidad

⁶⁹Naipaul, *Miguel Street*, 8.

⁷⁰Naipaul, *Miguel Street*, 23.

⁷¹Naipaul, *Miguel Street*, 92.

⁷²Naipaul, *Miguel Street*, 127.

people does only lie, lie. Lie is all they know. They could fool you, boys, but they can't fool me."⁷³ He tears up the winning ticket.

B. Wordsworth is a poet who says he added one line a month to his opus, but when he dies there is no poem. A year later even his house is gone; "there was brick and concrete everywhere. It was as if B. Wordsworth had never existed."⁷⁴ Eventually the narrator grows up and his mother decides he needs an education or he will end up like the rest of Miguel Street. In the final scene he leaves for England.

Naipaul pointed out that colonial society offered no role models of its own to young people, so Trinidadians had to look elsewhere. Naipaul's narrator painted a disturbing picture of an impoverished colonial society where the inhabitants lacked hope for the future. In the end, the boy proclaimed, "I no longer wanted to be like Eddoes: He was so weak and thin, and I hadn't realized that he was so small. . . . Everything had changed."⁷⁵

For Naipaul, Miguel Street was not just a slum but rather a world in which he spent a portion of his childhood. In an article he wrote in 1958 Naipaul said, "Trinidadians are more recognizably 'characters' than people in England. Only a man's eccentricities can get him attention. It might also be that in a society without traditions, without patterns, every man finds it easier 'to be himself.'"⁷⁶ These are the people Naipaul wanted to introduce. Like Mais's barrack-yard people, they were out of the political spotlight. These people would not benefit from labor reforms because they did

⁷³Naipaul, *Miguel Street*, 135.

⁷⁴Naipaul, *Miguel Street*, 46.

⁷⁵Naipaul, *Miguel Street*, 152.

⁷⁶V.S. Naipaul, "London," 20.

not hold regular jobs. Even Bogart, who benefited from an American job, went back to his old habits once his job ended.

In a rare contemporary review of *Miguel Street*, Whitney Balliet, a reviewer for *Time*, described Naipaul's characters as misfits.⁷⁷ However, Naipaul and Nassan in their comments disagreed. These two West Indians believed that Naipaul's characters could be found on any street, in any city, in the West Indies.

East Indians in Trinidad

Two writers from Trinidad tried to call attention to another segment of the West Indian population. Naipaul and Sam Selvon wrote about the East Indian experience in the West Indies. Selvon focused on the process of assimilation, while Naipaul took a serio-comic look at their lives.

Naipaul also explored the lives of East Indians in Trinidad. *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) is his masterpiece about an East Indian family in Trinidad.⁷⁸ The story contains two threads, that of Mr. Biswas and his family and that of the Tulsis, the family into which he married. Both groups try to live within an enclosed East Indian world centered around family, village and land, but they are forced to adjust to the circumstances of life around them as they interact more with the outside world of the British and the majority black population.

Mr. Mohan Biswas, who is called Mr. from birth, is born into a poor East Indian family in rural Trinidad. At birth both the midwife and the local pundit, a scholar or teacher skilled in Hindu law, religion, and philosophy who teaches spiritual development, predict he will be a failure. With little formal education, he first goes to work as a

⁷⁷Whitney Balliet, "Review of *Miguel Street*," *Time* 36 (August 27, 1960): 98.

⁷⁸V.S. Naipaul, *A House for Mr. Biswas* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1961).

pundit-apprentice, but is let go when he defiles his guardian's oleander tree. He next loses a job working in his aunt's rum shop when a dishonest manager convinces her that Mr. Biswas is stealing. His next job is as a sign painter for the powerful, conservative, landowning Tulsi family.

When Mr. Biswas expresses an interest in one of the Tulsi daughters, Shama, he is trapped into a marriage by Mrs. Tulsi, the family matriarch, because he is from the correct caste, Brahmin. Because of his poverty, Mr. Biswas is expected to live in the family home, Hanuman House, which Naipaul describes as an alien fortress, painted white, that is bulky and impregnable. Life at Hanuman House, where most of the Tulsi children and their spouses lived, is scripted; some hold places of power; some remain insignificant. The position of family members in the family hierarchy is based on their family connection and the position they hold in society. Because Mr. Biswas married a younger daughter and has no social position outside the family he and Shama are given a small room and he is not allowed to participate in family discussions. When Mr. Biswas learns that he is expected to remain insignificant, he rebels. At first he flees, but he has no refuge so he returns. Next he tries defiance; he buys his daughter a doll house for Christmas, knowing that the Tulsis give the same presents to all the children so as not to show favoritism. When his defiance finally leads to a fight with one of his brothers-in-law, Govind, the family exiles Biswas to its shop in Chase Village. The shop is a failure. Mr. Biswas even misses the organization of Hanuman House. "The House was a world, more real than the Chase, and less exposed; everything beyond its gates was foreign and unimportant and could be ignored."⁷⁹

⁷⁹Naipaul, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, 188.

Mr. Biswas's next job is as a driver and sub-overseer at Green Vale, the family's sugar plantation. He is a failure there, as well. The workers intimidate him and do what they want. He builds his own house as a sign of his independence and authority, but it collapses in a storm. Once more the Tulsis rescue him. This time he suffers a mental breakdown. When he recovers, he decides to resume his search for independence in Port of Spain. "He was going into the world, to test it for its power to frighten. The past was counterfeit, a series of cheating accidents."⁸⁰

Life in the city is no easier. Mr. Biswas lives at the Tulsis' city home which is just as crowded and rigidly ordered as Hanuman House. He does manage to get a job as a writer at the *Trinidad Sentinel*, the local newspaper, where he achieves some success. When a new group takes over the paper, though, they appreciate his talent less. Mr. Biswas tells his son, "I don't depend on them for a job. You know that. We could go back anytime to Hanuman House. All of us."⁸¹ He has not overcome his dependence on the Tulsis.

The Tulsis are forced to change as well, though. Increasing contact with the Creole world and with the West Indian lifestyle undermines life at Hanuman House. One son's Presbyterian-educated wife speaks English, wears Western clothing, and demands a vacation in a family where the women generally have left the estate only for weddings, funerals, and house blessings. The children begin to attend city schools. "There was no longer a Hanuman House to protect them: everyone had to fight for himself in a new world . . . where education was the only protection."⁸²

⁸⁰Naipaul, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, 305.

⁸¹Naipaul, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, 380.

⁸²Naipaul, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, 456.

When Mr. Biswas finally breaks away from the Tulsis, he is convinced to buy a rickety new house of inferior quality by an unscrupulous salesman. The staircase is dangerous. There is no back door, the windows stick, and the mortgage is high. He has a home of his own, though. Mr. Biswas dies unemployed, but he believes it could have been worse.

How terrible it would have been . . . to have died among the Tulsis, amid the squalor of that large, disintegrating and indifferent family; to have left Shama [his wife] and the children among them, in one room; worse, to have lived without even attempting to lay claim to one's portion of the earth; to have lived and died as one had been born, unnecessary and unaccommodated.⁸³

In certain ways *A House for Mr. Biswas* mirrored Naipaul's own life. He grew up in a Hindu East Indian family. He has described his childhood as disordered and unhappy, much as he portrays the Tulsi home. Even when he moved to Port of Spain, he remained isolated within his own ethnic group. Naipaul acknowledged that Mr. Biswas was based on his father who worked as a local correspondent for the *Trinidad Guardian*. His father also wrote short stories, most of which were about the Hindu community and he believed that Indian culture in Trinidad was decaying and limiting the ability of East Indians to prosper.⁸⁴

Naipaul's East Indians were very different from Selvon's, most likely as a result of their differing backgrounds. Both authors, though, implied that it was inevitable that East Indians would be forced eventually to integrate into West Indian society. Writing shortly after the novel was published, C.L.R. James said that "after reading *A House for Mr. Biswas* many of our people have a deeper understanding of the West Indies than they

⁸³Naipaul, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, 11.

⁸⁴Hassan, *V.S. Naipaul*, 57-63.

did before.” Of course, most West Indians would never read the book because low literacy rates continued to plague the islands.⁸⁵

Naipaul takes a characteristically humorous look at East Indians, their lives and ambitions, in the *Mystic Masseur* (1957), which details the difficulties one East Indian faces as he emerges from the closed society in which he was raised.⁸⁶ The novel opens with a boy describing his visit to Pundit Ganesh Ramsumair, the mystic masseur. “Later he was to be famous and honored throughout the South Caribbean. He was to be a hero of the people and, after that, a British representative at Lake Success. But when I first met him he was still a struggling masseur, at a time when masseurs were ten a penny in Trinidad.”⁸⁷ Naipaul then goes back to explain how Ganesh becomes famous. He is a poor student who works as an inept teacher in a school whose motto is “to form, not to inform.”⁸⁸ He just has to show student progress in his record book, not actually achieve any.

Ganesh soon quits his job and lives on oil royalties that he inherits from his father. He believes that his life has been shaped by Hindu destiny, even though he fails at everything he tries. He moves to the small village of Fuente Grove to found an institute for “the furthering of Hindu Culture and Science of Thought in Trinidad.”⁸⁹ He is going to write books, but “for more than two years Ganesh . . . lived in Fuente Grove and nothing big or encouraging happened.”⁹⁰ Eventually he writes a book entitled *101 Questions and Answers on the Hindu Religion*, literally a book of questions followed by

⁸⁵C.L.R. James, *Party Politics in the West Indies* (San Juan, Trinidad: Vedic Enterprises Ltd., 1962), 150.

⁸⁶V.S. Naipaul, *The Mystic Masseur* (New York: Vintage Books, 1957).

⁸⁷Naipaul, *The Mystic Masseur*, 1.

⁸⁸Naipaul, *The Mystic Masseur*, 14.

⁸⁹Naipaul, *The Mystic Masseur*, 55.

⁹⁰Naipaul, *The Mystic Masseur*, 57.

answers. His friends are impressed but no one buys the book. Years later in another book, *The Years of Guilt*, Ganesh writes, “Everything happens for the best. If, for instance, my first volume had been a success, it is likely that I would have become a mere theologian, writing endless glosses on the Hindu scriptures. As it was, I found my true path.”⁹¹

Ganesh eventually advertises himself as a mystic and a masseur, begins to dress in traditional Indian garb, and calls himself pundit. A Hindu pundit is a scholar and teacher of law and philosophy who also acts as a spiritual guide and healer. He buys books, which he values for the number of feet of space they occupy rather than their content. At first he fails at healing, but he suddenly manages to cure the black child of obsessive guilt; this is the child who describes him in the opening paragraph of the book. His reputation spreads throughout the island; “within two weeks all Trinidad knew about Ganesh and his powers.”⁹² He gets more clients than he can handle. He reissues *101 Questions*, which becomes a best seller.

His success makes Ganesh rich. Fuente Grove prospers too, especially after Ganesh builds a Hindu temple there and writes *The Guide to Trinidad* in which he urges visitors to come see the famous temple. People flock to the village. He writes *What God Told Me*, “a classic in Trinidad literature [that] established Ganesh finally, without question.”⁹³

In 1944 Ganesh decides to enter politics. He becomes president of the Hindu Association by questioning the current leadership. He uses his new position to win election to the Legislative Council in the first elections held under universal adult

⁹¹Naipaul, *The Mystic Masseur*, 101.

⁹²Naipaul, *The Mystic Masseur*, 125.

⁹³Naipaul, *The Mystic Masseur*, 152-153.

suffrage. He moves to Port of Spain and becomes “a public figure of great importance.”⁹⁴ He challenges the government and helps both rich and poor, for a small fee, of course. At first the British dismiss him as an irresponsible agitator.

Things change for Ganesh in 1949 when he decides to mediate the end of a sugar strike. All he knows about the strike is what he reads in the newspapers, that the workers have gone on strike for higher pay. When he speaks to the strikers he urges them to be patient. He talks about the political and economic situation in Trinidad and about the fight against colonialism. It turns out that what began as a strike has turned into a lockout during the slow season, a common occurrence in an industry characterized by periods of high and low intensity. The workers want their jobs back and expect Ganesh to work out a deal with the management. Ganesh calls a press conference to make the most of the situation.

He said Providence had opened his eyes to the errors of his ways. He warned that the labour movement in Trinidad was dominated by communists and he had often unwittingly been made their tool. “From now on,” he said, “I pledge my life to the fight against communism in Trinidad and the rest of the free world.”⁹⁵

He becomes a supporter of British government policy. The Colonial Office report on Trinidad for 1949 describes Ganesh as an important political leader. He is awarded an M.B.E. (Member of the British Empire), and sent abroad by the British to defend colonial policy. At the end of the novel he is living in England and has changed his name to G. Ramsay Muir, Esq., M.B.E.

Although Naipaul’s novels always seemed to make fun of absurd characters, there was an underlying tone of seriousness. He believed that East Indians had been brought

⁹⁴Naipaul, *The Mystic Masseur*, 200.

⁹⁵Naipaul, *The Mystic Masseur*, 206.

up in such a closed society that they often failed to grasp the reality of their lives. The British compounded the problem by their attempts to hold on to power. Even when Ganesh was elected to office, the British failed to show him respect. Of course, Ganesh could not even grasp the problems involved in the workers' dispute. Naipaul implied that Ganesh had not been properly educated to take on a serious role in government. He succeeded in moving ahead in life only when he adopted the British position. Once he supported their views, the British did not care how uneducated or inappropriate he was.

A *Trinidad Guardian* review praised the book.

There is, undoubtedly, the ring of truth in the character and circumstances of Ganesh Ramsumair. . . . In fact Ganesh is a composite of persons you will be tempted to believe you know if you are Trinidadian.⁹⁶

David Tylden-Wright described the book as presenting "life in the raw, as seen in Trinidad."⁹⁷ He went on to say that Naipaul showed insight into his characters. As the *Guardian* review asserted, although the characters sometimes seem eccentric, they were people one was likely to meet on the streets of Trinidad. In fact, Naipaul meant them to be eccentric because that was how he viewed the people about whom he wrote. Naipaul's irreverent attitude should not mask the fact that his message is very much the same as Lamming's; people in the West Indies do what they have to in order to survive and when they get involved in politics, at least in these early years of pre-independence, they often do so for personal gain, without much concern for the people they purport to help.

⁹⁶"Ganesh in the Years of Guilt," *Trinidad Sunday Guardian*, June 16, 1957, 23.

⁹⁷David Tylden-Wright, "Out of Joint," *Times Literary Supplement* (May 31, 1957): 333.

In 1952 Selvon's novel *A Brighter Sun* appeared.⁹⁸ Selvon was born in Trinidad in 1923 into a Scottish-East Indian family. His father was a dry goods merchant. Selvon graduated from high school but could not pursue further education because he had to go to work. He developed a love of literature while at school, though, and continued to read when his formal education ended. He served in the West Indian branch of the Royal Naval Reserve during World War II. After the war he worked as a journalist and wrote short stories, some about his own experiences and some encouraging West Indians to think for themselves. In "The Story of a Tree," published in the *Evening News* in June 1947, he urged Trinidadians to appreciate their island. He said, "Let's don't let others come and tell us of our own land."⁹⁹ His novels focused less on the West Indian as distinct and more on East Indians and their process of assimilation reflecting his own background growing up in San Fernando, Trinidad's second largest city, in contrast to Naipaul's, who he grew up in an isolated Hindu community in San Fernando, Trinidad's second largest city. Selvon said, "I grew up in Trinidad completely westernized, completely creolised, not following any harsh, strict religious or racial idea at all."¹⁰⁰

Selvon's *A Brighter Sun* is set in Barataria, a suburban village of Port of Spain, where Selvon explores the experiences of East Indians after they leave the plantations and have to deal with the problems of integration and urbanization in a rapidly developing village during World War II. The themes that Selvon confronts here, the West Indian search for identity in a colonial, pluralistic society based on a history of slavery and indentured servitude, recur in most West Indian literature.

⁹⁸Samuel Selvon, *A Brighter Sun* (London: Longman, [1952] 1989).

⁹⁹Samuel Selvon, *Foreday Morning: Selected Prose, 1946-1986*, Kenneth Ramchand and Susheila Nasta, eds., (London: Longman, 1989), 28.

¹⁰⁰John Thieme, "Interview with Samuel Selvon," in Martin Zehnder, ed., *Something Rich and Strange: Selected Essays on Sam Selvon* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2003), 118.

In *A Brighter Sun* Tiger, the protagonist, is a newly-married East Indian who leaves his peasant family in Chaguanas, where many indentured Indian workers have settled, to live with his new wife, Urmilla, in Barataria, “almost as cosmopolitan as the city.”¹⁰¹ Tiger has to deal with the realities of life in a multiracial society under the neo-colonial domination of the Americans during World War II.

There was a change in the economic and social life and outlook of Trinidadians in 1941. United States personnel arrived, and the construction of bases provided work at high wages – higher than anyone had ever worked for before. Clerks quit their desks and papers and headed for the bases, farmers left the land untilled, labourers deserted the oil and sugar industries in the south. There was a rush to where the money flowed. . . . The city was crammed as the Yankee dollar lured men away from home and family.¹⁰²

Tiger believes that his lack of education and his peasant background hold him back, so he tries to expand his knowledge and experience. His neighbors, Joe and Rita, a black couple, and old Sookdeo, a fellow Indian who is the village expert on planting and reading, help him.

In Selvon’s narrative East Indian prejudice against both blacks and whites is apparent. Tiger’s family warns him that he should keep his distance from whites and limit his association with blacks. Tiger’s uncle says, “Nigger people all right, but you must let creole keep they distance. You too young to know about these things, but I older than you. Allyuh better make Indian friend.”¹⁰³ The racial tension in the community is apparent. When Tiger is kept waiting by a Creole store clerk because a white woman enters the shop, he realizes that although he believes as an Indian that he is better than

¹⁰¹Selvon, *A Brighter Sun*, 9.

¹⁰²Selvon, *A Brighter Sun*, 17.

¹⁰³Selvon, *A Brighter Sun*, 48.

blacks, whites see no difference. Gradually, though, he realizes this is a negative attitude that he must change. When his wife Urmilla needs medical attention, the black and Indian doctors refuse to come to her aid, but a white doctor from an exclusive Port-of-Spain neighborhood does. Old Sookdeo has told him “Haveam some thing yuh learn only by experience.”¹⁰⁴ Tiger’s interaction with the doctors teaches him that good and evil is everywhere. He begins to ask “Ain’t a man is a man, don’t mind if he skin not white, or if he hair curl?”¹⁰⁵ His family disagrees with his new attitude. When they meet his black friends, Joe and Rita, they advise, “Is only nigger friend you makeam since you come? . . . Plenty Indian liveam dis side. It true them is good neighbour, but you must look for Indian friend, like you and you wife. Indian must keep together.”¹⁰⁶

As Tiger continues to learn about his new multiracial society he wants to encourage an interracial unity against those in power, whatever their color. He asks Joe, “But listen, it ain’t have a way how we could govern weself? Ain’t it have a thing call self-government?”¹⁰⁷ Tiger eventually decides to become a politician, saying he will fight for “everybody rights, not only Indian.”¹⁰⁸ When Sookdeo dies, it is Tiger who replaces him as the villager with secret knowledge of planting and the written word. The novel ends as Tiger takes on his new leadership role.

In an interview in 1979 Selvon said that *A Brighter Sun* was not based on his own personal history, but that he set it in a suburb of Port of Spain because he was living there when he wrote it.¹⁰⁹ He described growing up in the Trinidad of the 1930s where racial

¹⁰⁴Selvon, *A Brighter Sun*, 13.

¹⁰⁵Selvon, *A Brighter Sun*, 48.

¹⁰⁶Selvon, *A Brighter Sun*, 47-48.

¹⁰⁷Selvon, *A Brighter Sun*, 196.

¹⁰⁸Selvon, *A Brighter Sun*, 203.

¹⁰⁹Sam Selvon, “Sam Selvon Talking: A Conversation with Kenneth Ramchand,” *Canadian Literature* 95 (winter 1982): 58.

tensions between blacks and East Indians did not exist. He explained that living in the Caribbean you become Creolized, “you’re not Indian, you’re not Black, you’re not white; you assimilate all these cultures and you turn out to be a different man who is the Caribbean man.”¹¹⁰ He said that this is what he wrote about, the ability to form one unified Caribbean nation. *A Brighter Sun* was his way of introducing the subject of a Caribbean identity through Tiger. Tiger left the countryside to search for a new life of prosperity. In an urban setting he struggled to define himself in relation to the people around him, other East Indians, blacks, and the Americans who dominated Trinidad in the early 1940s. Selvon’s answer to Tiger’s dilemma was for his protagonist to begin a process of drawing people together to work toward a new Trinidad. Although the novel was set on the island before the advent of serious racial problems between blacks and East Indians, Selvon wrote it after racial differences had begun to lead to violence.

In a contemporary review of the novel, an anonymous critic in *Time* magazine said, “What makes *A Brighter Sun* shine more steadily than most current fiction is a freshness of speech and locale that is as welcome as its direct, unsurprised look at life.” The reviewer went on to praise Selvon for his depictions of the native squalor and insular ignorance of a Caribbean island.¹¹¹ The critique was typical of subsequent analyses that praised Selvon’s use of dialect and local settings to portray the reality of Trinidadian life but failed to deal with his theme of Creolization. A British reviewer, Alan Ross, praised Selvon’s ability to “catch the quality of native colonial life so dispassionately and with

¹¹⁰Dance, *New World Adams*, 234.

¹¹¹“A Place in the Sun,” *Time* 61 (January 19, 1953): 104.

such literary skill when he has himself been a member of a similar community to that which he describes.”¹¹²

Selvon also explores race relations in Trinidad and the persistence of colonial mentalities in *Turn Again Tiger*.¹¹³ In the novel *Tiger*, a character in Selvon’s earlier novel *A Brighter Sun*, decides to leave Barataria, a suburb of Port of Spain, to return to the country to help his father, who claims he has taken a job as an overseer on an experimental sugarcane project at Five Rivers Estate. It is not a decision Tiger reaches easily: “Sometimes a step back better than staying in the same place: the next time you move forward you might be able to make a big stride and go way pass where you was before.”¹¹⁴

Tiger and his wife Urmilla rent out their home in Barataria and move to Five Rivers Village with its sugar estate, just five miles east of the city. While in the city Tiger had learned to read and write and become independent from his past. When he returns, though, he finds that his job is to work as a timekeeper for his father who is not in charge of the project, just the foreman. The young couple move in with Tiger’s father.

Tiger’s new modern outlook clashes with his father’s old ways. His father and the whole village of former indentured servants are content to rely on the estate owners for their livelihood. The older man believes that his job as foreman is a sign of his success; Tiger disagrees. When Tiger moves back to the village and into his father’s home, his father expects Tiger and his wife to obey his rules. Tiger challenges his father’s authority, which results in a brutal fight. Tiger also burns his books, which have not led him in a new direction but have separated him from his peasant past. He decides

¹¹²Alan Ross, “Struggle for Existence,” *Times Literary Supplement* (February 15, 1952), 121.

¹¹³Sam Selvon, *Turn Again Tiger* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1958).

¹¹⁴Selvon, *Turn Again Tiger*, 7.

he must live life, not rely on book to teach him. In addition, Tiger becomes fascinated with the wife of the white overseer. Their affair causes Tiger to lose some respect for white authority and the relationship ends in a violent sexual encounter.

All of these events change Tiger. After their confrontation, he and his father begin to respect each other. Tiger realizes that his salvation is not in books, but in his own ability to make decisions for himself. His admiration for white authority vanishes. Tiger repeats his earlier thought: “Sometimes when you take one step back you could make two in front after.”¹¹⁵ Tiger becomes a leader of the peasant community at Five Rivers. He resolves disputes and act as mediator between East Indian workers and white owners. His neighbors respect him not because of what he learns from his books but because he has come back to the countryside and earned their respect. Tiger discovers that he does not have to leave his colonial past behind in order to move away from it. He concludes that his stay at Five Rivers has not been a waste of time: “I feel more like a man than when I first come.”¹¹⁶

One of the goals of West Indian writers was to change the colonial attitudes of islanders, particularly the peasants. Selvon wanted to show how difficult it was to challenge colonial mentalities. In a speech delivered in 1979 Selvon said that East Indians had failed to provide the younger generation with a sense of confidence.¹¹⁷ Tiger would appear to represent that view. He had improved his life in the city, but he had no permanent job. When he father offered him a position that he thought would give him more authority, he decided to take it.

¹¹⁵Selvon, *Turn Again Tiger*, 150.

¹¹⁶Selvon, *Turn Again Tiger*, 169.

¹¹⁷Sam Selvon, “Three Into One Can’t Go – East Indian, Trinidadian, West Indian,” in Selvon, *Foreday Morning*, 223.

In an interview in 1980 Selvon touched on two of the issues that he dealt with in *Turn Again Tiger*, the conflict between generations of East Indians and the East Indian attitude toward white colonials. Selvon said that his parents never forced him to learn native Indian or Hindu customs. He grew up, as he had said before, in a family that had assimilated. Still, he knew East Indians who were raised like Tiger; in the circumstances presented in the novel where Tiger returned to live in his father's house, a young East Indian would have been expected to follow Indian cultural norms and live by his father's rules. In terms of white power, Selvon said that Tiger's attack on the overseer's wife was meant to symbolize an East Indian attack on white supremacy. It was intended to help Tiger come to terms with himself and with his life; Selvon said, "he got rid of the whole thing [East Indian inferiority] out of his system."¹¹⁸

In *Turn Again Tiger* the old way of life in the village had not changed. Five Rivers, Trinidad, was similar to the Barbadian village that Lamming had described several years earlier in *In the Castle of My Skin*. Both books described villages under the control of a white owner. Both were real places – Lamming's the village of his childhood, Selvon's Five Rivers a real village with an estate that grew experimental cane.¹¹⁹ Although he never lived there, Selvon was familiar with East Indians who lived under these conditions. They were often left out of the political and economic advances the islands were making. Selvon wanted to make that point.

One contemporary review described Selvon's novel as "vivid . . . drenched in sunlight, toughing in it poverty, and flashingly alive in the near-calypto lingo of its

¹¹⁸Dance, *New World Adams*, 235.

¹¹⁹Salick Roydon, *The Novels of Sam Selvon: A Critical Study* (New York: Greenwood Press, 2001), 42.

hopeful gossiping peasant.”¹²⁰ Reviews tended to focus on the novels as literature rather than in the historical insight they brought to West Indian life; no review touched on the significance of the novel in terms of the political, economic, or cultural debates taking place in 1957 Trinidad.

Naipaul and Selvon were determined to bring to light the problems of the people they knew best, East Indians in Trinidad. Although Naipaul’s characters often appeared to be caricatures, as we have seen, people familiar with the West Indies asserted the reality of many of his portraits. His characters represented East Indians, like himself, who had come of age outside of mainstream society in the West Indies. He placed much of the blame for their situation on the East Indian community itself but also on the British who perpetuated the situation by failing to offer political and economic opportunities to the native populations on the islands. Selvon was not a produce of this East Indian social pattern but he recognized it as a concern for that ethnic group. Like Naipaul, he blamed both the East Indian community that closed itself off from the wider society, and also like Naipaul, the British for establishing and reinforcing the idea of British superiority and native inferiority.

Conclusion

These authors whose work marked the beginning of West Indian literature hoped to challenge West Indians to discover themselves and their world. They wrote knowing that most islanders would never read their books, but in the hope that island leaders and British readers would come to a greater understanding of the problems facing the West Indies. Their novels confronted issues that political leaders were dealing with in trying to

¹²⁰“Mixed Fiction,” *Time* 73 (June 15, 1959): 16. The only other review of the novel said even less about it and did not recommend it. See Arthur Calder-Marshall, “Uprooted Blooms,” *Times Literary Supplement* (December 19, 1958): 733.

take political control from the British. Unlike previous West Indian writers, these men made it clear that they blamed the British for current problems the islands faced as they tried to secure independence.

Vic Reid and George Lamming used history to make their points. Reid believed that it was essential that West Indians understand that they were not being given a gift of independence by the British. *New Day* showed that Jamaicans had worked to achieve their new Constitution in 1944. Lamming based *In the Castle of My Skin* on his own life growing up in Barbados. He described a society dominated by the British, particularly a British landlord and a British-style education that completely ignored his own history at a Barbadian. Lamming believed that the colonial system explained why he and other West Indians considered themselves British. Lamming was the first to question the motives of new West Indian leaders in the character of Mr. Slime, who deceived the locals into thinking they would own the land when the British landlord was gone. Only the rich actually got land.

Other writers continued to focus on the poorest West Indians living in barrack-yards and poor neighborhoods. Roger Mais wrote about both groups. *The Hills Were Joyful Together* focused on individual experiences in a Kingston barrack-yard. There was an overwhelming sense that everyone was concerned with survival allowing little room for hope. Only the two women who attended church services in the hills offered hope; they were minor characters. Mais's *Brother Man* was set in a poor Kingston neighborhood. Brother Man was a Rastafarian, a member of the religious groups that was discriminated against by many Jamaicans and by the government. He was well respected in the neighborhood because he helped his neighbors. Most of the characters in

the novel were not much better off than those in the yard. Girlie, for example, believed she had to have a man to take care of her. Papacita preferred to scheme for a living rather than work. Only Brother Man offered hope. Even when he suffered because the Rastas were accused of a violent crime, he did not despair; eventually his neighbors, who at first condemned him, came to his aid. On Naipaul's *Miguel Street* there was little hope for the residents either, whether black or East Indian. Once again, the characters merely survived. Eddoes, the scavenger-cart driver, was the only one with a regular job. Naipaul portrayed a colonial society that caused people to lack hope for the future, which he believed the inhabitants of Miguel Street displayed. Working got the black population little; the British controlled society and jobs.

Sam Selvon and Naipaul looked at another aspect of West Indian society by writing about the East Indian experience in Trinidad from two very different perspectives. Selvon's *A Brighter Sun* was about the process of assimilation some East Indians underwent. Tiger left the countryside for life in the city. He learned to be tolerant of other ethnic groups and vowed to try to work to establish a multiracial society. Naipaul, on the other hand, wrote about an East Indian society that worked to remain isolated from its black and white neighbors. Ultimately they failed. Both Selvon and Naipaul used their own childhood experiences as background. In their different ways, both seemed to acknowledge that isolation was no longer possible for East Indians.

Naipaul and Selvon were aware of the particular problems that East Indians experienced. Often their cultural heritage had kept them outside mainstream West Indian society. Naipaul's character took an East Indian, Hindu path to success that left him unprepared to assume political office and unaware of the problems of the majority of

workers. Selvon's character found it difficult to escape his past. Ultimately he had to confront the past, and British authority as well, in order to move forward.

All of these novels portrayed West Indian lives that politicians would have recognized. They grew up in the same societies that Reid and Lamming described; it was their similar experiences that had inspired them to become politically active. The people who inhabited Mais's barrack-yard and his and Naipaul's poor neighborhood were the same people many politicians had failed to help, but whose political support they desired. Selvon's and Naipaul's East Indians were an integral part of the political development of Trinidad in the 1940s and 50s.

The fact that these novels were read at least by the leaders of society was apparent as well. Reid and Mais were both connected to political activities in Jamaica, which meant that they were known to the local population. At least some of Naipaul's work was critiqued by C.L.R. James, who remained close to Eric Williams and his efforts in Trinidad in the early 1950s. Again, that showed that there was a connection between the writers and the islands' political leaders. Lamming's work was available through the BBC's Caribbean Voices program, which was broadcast back to the islands. The majority of the population, the people Mais and Naipaul described, was not reading for pleasure, and thus did not feel the impact of novels written about them.

CHAPTER VI
EXILE AND POLITICS IN WEST INDIAN LITERATURE
1949-1962

“Time Plants the Seeds of Anger”¹

In Chapter Six we will continue to look at novels by West Indians in the 1950s and early 60s, specifically two elements of their novels. First, most writers chose to leave the islands for England looking for opportunity and success as they launched their careers. They expected to be welcomed and accepted. When they were not, they began to ask why. The émigré experience became an important aspect of the work which they explored in their novels. Second, about the same time some of these men became aware of shortcomings on the part of many of the islands’ new local leaders, who seemed to be as ignorant of local problems and as self-absorbed by what they could gain for themselves as the British had been. Several novels focused on the newly elected political leaders who replaced the British.

The Artist in England and at Home

Many West Indian writers moved to England because they believed it was their only chance for success.² There was the small reading audience in the West Indies.

¹Martin Carter, “Death of a Slave,” in Bruce King, ed., *West Indian Literature* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1979), 52.

²Vic Reid was the exception. He spent some time in England and some time in the United States, but he did most of his writing in Jamaica, because, he said, his “passion for Jamaica was too strong.” Daryl Cumber Dance, ed., *New World Adams: Conversations with Contemporary West Indian Writers*. (Leeds, Yorkshire: Peepal Tree Books, [1984] 1992), 206; Daryl Cumber Dance, “Vic Reid,” in Daryl Cumber

There was the lack of publishing houses. Most important, these men had grown up thinking of themselves as British and adhering to British standards in their education. London seemed to be the obvious choice if they wanted successful writing careers. What they found was that they were outsiders in British society. George Lamming and Sam Selvon were the first to write about their experiences as émigrés in England.

In 1954 Lamming became the first West Indian novelist to consider the plight of the West Indian artist in his novel *The Emigrants*. Lamming himself left Trinidad in 1950 after a four-year residence there teaching school. He believed he could not become a writer as long as he stayed in the Caribbean. West Indians who did read considered novels on local topics inferior. Authors were forced to supplement their income by working, as teachers, like Lamming, journalists, or broadcasters. By 1950 West Indians who wanted to write moved abroad.³ Lamming's goal in *The Emigrants* was not only to record one person's experience, the idea that the mother country was the ideal and the only place to achieve real success, but to convey what he called the myth of colonialism that drew West Indians to emigrate to England.⁴ In *The Pleasures of Exile*, a collection of essays on literature and his own work, Lamming wrote, "This *myth* begins in the West Indian from the earliest stages of his education. . . . It begins with the fact of England's supremacy in taste and judgement."⁵

Lamming writes *The Emigrants* in the form of a series of episodic events that are loosely tied together. The narrator, a writer leaving the islands because he wants to

Dance, ed., *Fifty Caribbean Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 378.

³Ian H. Munro, "George Lamming," in Dance, ed., *Fifty Caribbean Writers*, 264-265.

⁴George Lamming, *The Emigrants* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, [1954] 1994).

⁵George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, [1960] 1992), 27.

become successful, has spent four years in Trinidad, but the experience “seemed nothing more than an extension of what had gone before, but for this important difference. I had known a greater personal freedom.”⁶ The reference is to the fact that he grew up on another island, Barbados, and believed that taking a job in Trinidad would bring him success; it did not. That personal freedom he experienced is limited by the constraints of colonial society, so the narrator chooses to leave. His destination, England, is an obvious choice to one educated to believe in that country’s cultural superiority.⁷

The novel begins on a ship that travels from island to island in the Caribbean picking up passengers who are journeying to England for a new start. Collis, a writer, tells the story of the voyage. His artistic skill separates him a bit from the group, but it does not distance him so much that he is outside it; he is still a West Indian. Most of the travelers just want a job, an economic opportunity. In the novel they will arrive in post-World War II London where well-paying jobs are scarce and the economy is suffering.

When the voyagers first meet the men argue about the superiority of one island over another, but as the journey progresses they realize they share much in common. As one says, “All you down here is my brothers . . . All you . . . an’ that’s why I tell you as I tell you to stop this monkey-talk ‘bout big islan’ an’ small islan’ . . . Just ask yuhselfes . . . if any o’ you want to go back ever to the place you leavin’.”⁸ It is clear that they are looking for something. “Whatever the island each may have come from, everything is crystal clear. Everybody is in flight and no one knows what he’s fleeing to. A better

⁶Lamming, *The Emigrants*, 8.

⁷Lamming wrote about the influence of a British education on West Indians in *In the Castle of My Skin*. See Chapter 5 for details of that novel.

⁸Lamming, *The Emigrants*, 39.

break. A better break. That's what we say."⁹ The voyage forges a new national consciousness. One man, just called the Jamaican, expresses it well. "Different man, different island, but de same outlook. Dat's de meanin' o' West Indies. De wahter between dem islands doan' separate dem."¹⁰

Once they get to England the men are surprised by what they find. It is cold in April. An English man is astonished that one emigre spoke "excellent English for a foreigner"¹¹ and wonders where his island, Grenada, is located. It shocks the newcomers to find that the British know so little about them when their whole education has been about the British. Eventually they each lose their faith in the country.

In London they are forced to deal with their individual problems; the united group dissolves. The poorer West Indians live a shabby, depressing existence. Even the middle-class immigrants, who can afford to live comfortably, are disillusioned by the experience of being outsiders. Higgins, who thinks he is going to cooking school, finds out the ad to which he responded is a fraud. He cannot find a job, but remains optimistic. One day he agrees to help out a new African friend by delivering a package for him; the package contains drugs and Higgins is arrested. Dickson, a schoolteacher from Barbados who wants to get a better teaching job in England, forms a relationship with a white Englishwoman but discovers she is interested in him only as a stereotypical black male who can provide her with a new experience. Collis, who seeks success as a writer, earns his living as a factory worker and an incompetent one at that. During a visit to the

⁹Lamming, *The Emigrants*, 50.

¹⁰Lamming, *The Emigrants*, 61.

¹¹Lamming, *The Emigrants*, 117.

English family of a friend from Trinidad, he is asked, “Why do so many of your people come here?”¹²

One of the voyagers tries to offer a ray of hope.

“But even take the English. My feeling for them was no hate, not real hate, ‘cause when I come to think of it, if they’d just show one sign of friendship, just a little sign of appreciation for people like me an’ you who from the time we were born, in school an’ after school, we were hearin’ about them, if they could understan’ and be different then all the hate you talk about would disappear.”¹³

Collis best describes the alienation and despair on which the novel ends; in England, he says, “I have no people.”¹⁴

Lamming wrote *The Emigrants* to describe his own experiences and those of other West Indians he met as he traveled to and lived in England. In an interview in 1970 Lamming said, “I went to London as an ordinary immigrant going to see if I could make it.”¹⁵ In the course of his journey and during the first years he lived in London, he learned that England did not necessarily welcome him. Lamming’s novel described a situation that many West Indians faced. The literary critic Frederick Pilkington, in an article in 1951, confirmed the situation.

When the Jamaican leaves his beautiful country, on account of economic hardship, to seek his fortune in Britain he comes as a loyal subject of the British Crown speaking English as his native tongue and expecting to find a welcome akin to that given to visitors to his country. In disillusionment the idea of the land of plenty is soon dispelled.¹⁶

¹²Lamming, *The Emigrants*, 141.

¹³Lamming, *The Emigrants*, 185.

¹⁴Lamming, *The Emigrants*, 280.

¹⁵Ian Munro and Reinhard Sander, eds., *Kas-Kas: Interviews with Three Caribbean Writers in Texas*, George Lamming, C.L.R. James, Wilson Harris (Austin: University of Texas, 1972), 11.

¹⁶Frederick Pilkington, “Jamaicans in England,” *Contemporary Review* 179 (March 1951): 170.

According to other observers, in 1954 the situation for West Indians in England had deteriorated.

Increasing numbers of Negroes have poured into postwar Britain from Jamaica and the other British West Indies, lured by reports of full employment and encouraged by cut-rate fares promoted by travel agents. Clotting in tight, unhappy knots . . . they swelled Britain's Negro population to more than 50,000 . . . The signs of rising tension were clear and troubling . . . slogans appeared on walls "Keep Britain White." Some pubs refused Negroes admittance."¹⁷

Lamming's novel confirmed these reports. Higgins was defrauded of his money with the promise of a cooking school that did not exist. Dickson believed he could make more money as a teacher in England but became the victim of racial stereotyping instead. Collis had to go to work in a factory because he could not get his work published. Still they stayed, trying to figure out why they did not fit in and how they might.

In a contemporary critique an unknown reviewer in *Time* credited Lamming with accurately documenting a situation he had experienced firsthand.¹⁸ Another reviewer, Arthur Calder-Marshall, wrote that Lamming

begins with the long voyage to Plymouth [England], during which he presents his characters in a mass, so much a part of a movement that they are scarcely individuals . . . a reader is likely to reach Plymouth still uncertain of the difference between Higgins and Dickson . . . In the second section of the book the emigrants develop as characters, those with the greatest ambitions always meeting with the worst failure. And in the third section, in England two years later, the bitter revelation is carried still further.¹⁹

Calder-Marshall pointed out Lamming's technique of presenting his characters as a group while they are on the ship; it was likely that Lamming intended to present just that

¹⁷"The Color Bar," *Time* 65 (December 27, 1954): 58.

¹⁸"The Half World," *Time* 65 (April 25, 1955): 112.

¹⁹Arthur Calder-Marshall, "In Search of a Future," *Times Literary Supplement* (October 8, 1954): 637.

picture. The West Indians were anonymous to most British citizens who never tried to know them. Those who went to England for a specific reason, whether it was for an education or because of cultural ambitions, were disappointed more often than those who just went to find work, which was more readily available, although not in the form of the good jobs and good pay they had expected. In addition, the contemporary descriptions of the situation for West Indians in England in 1951 and 1954 show that the economic and social situation had deteriorated in these three years.

In another contemporary critique, reviewer Anthony West argued that Lamming misrepresented the problems of West Indians in London. “Lamming describes what happens to his people as if it happened because they were colored, although it is the fate of the stranger, the man from outside, in every community.”²⁰ Observations by contemporary journalists confirmed Lamming’s interpretation, though, as does another novel by West Indian author Sam Selvon.

In 1956 Trinidadian Sam Selvon, in *The Lonely Londoners*, also spoke about the difficult transition West Indians faced when they moved to England.²¹ Selvon emigrated to England in 1950. In an interview in 1979 he denied that he moved to England to be a success; he believed that the stories he published in local newspapers and those broadcast over the BBC Caribbean Voices, a radio program that accepted short stories and poetry from the West Indies and broadcast them back there, made him a success. He went to London because he was too young to settle down in Trinidad permanently without exploring the options life had to offer him. Selvon spent most of the rest of his life living

²⁰Anthony West, “Review of *The Emigrants*,” *New Yorker* 31 (May 28, 1955): 125.

²¹Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (London: Longman, [1956] 1972).

in England and in Canada.²² For a long time before he left Trinidad, though, he had been urging West Indians to appreciate local artists. He responded to an article in the Trinidad *Evening News* in 1947 that argued there was no true West Indian art by saying, “the undying hope of many an artist is that one day he will be recognized for his true worth. It is pitiful the reception books get that are published locally.”²³

In *The Lonely Londoners*, Selvon focuses on the West Indian experience in England. Although he occasionally refers to the island experiences of West Indians, he emphasizes the idea that it was their move to England that gave the islanders a sense of their shared experiences as West Indians. Selvon portrays West Indians as a fun-loving group living in contrast to the cold, uptight, serious British.

The novel has a narrator, but Selvon writes it from the perspective of Moses Aloetta, a West Indian reminiscing about his life in London where he has lived for the last decade. He finds little structure to his past. Moses begins to contemplate his history while he waits at the train station for Henry Oliver, a new immigrant who Moses labels Galahad, the latest newcomer on a quest for the seemingly unattainable goal of excitement and financial security in London. Moses has been involved actively with helping new arrivals integrate into the community for many years. For example, he finds lodging for them in various parts of London, because “he don’t want no concentrated area . . . as it is things bad enough already.”²⁴ He also supports West Indian immigrants by hosting regular get-togethers for them in his home where they can talk about what they have left behind. Little has changed for the newcomers over the years, except that they

²²Michael Fabre, “Samuel Selvon,” in Bruce King, ed., *West Indian Literature* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1979), 111; Dance, *New World Adams*, 230-232.

²³Samuel Selvon, *Foreday Morning: Selected Prose, 1946-1986* (London: Longman, 1989), 52.

²⁴Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 9.

arrive in increasing numbers. They generally take menial jobs and hope for security and respectability, which few of them achieve. Why are the British so anti-immigrant?

Moses speculates, “Well, as far as I could figure, they frighten that we get job in front of them, though that does never happen.”²⁵

As Moses reflects on London, he focuses on the sterility of life there in comparison to the relaxed society of the Caribbean where much of life is lived outside in the good weather; in London, “whatever the newspaper and radio say . . . that is the people Bible.”²⁶ He contrasts the depression of a London winter with the openness and summer light in the West Indies. The narrator affirms

“the people living in London . . . don’t know what happening in the room next to them, far more the street, or how other people living. London is a place like that. It divide up in little worlds and you stay in the world you belong to and you don’t know anything about what happening in the other ones except what you read in the papers.”²⁷

Selvon makes it clear that Londoners see the immigrants as all the same. Moses comments, “these days when one spade doing something wrong, they crying down the lot.”²⁸ Later, when a child says, “Look at that black man,” another West Indian responds

“Lord, what is it we people do in this world to have to suffer so? What is it we want that white people and them find so hard to give? A little work, a little food, a little place to sleep. We are not asking for the sun or the moon. We only want to get by, we don’t even want to get on.”²⁹

²⁵Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 23.

²⁶Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 8.

²⁷Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 58.

²⁸Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 20.

²⁹Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 96-97.

To counteract British prejudice, Selvon focuses on the diversity of the immigrants, challenging the misconception that they are all alike. In response to a reporter's question, Moses says,

“Now Moses don't know a damn thing about Jamaica – Moses come from Trinidad, which is a thousand miles from Jamaica, but the English people believe that everybody who come from the West Indies from Jamaica.”³⁰

Two characters represent the extremes in terms of adaptation, or not, to life in London. Harris has assimilated; he has become a black-Englishman in his own mind.

Harris . . . like English customs and thing, he does be polite and say thank you and he does get up in the bus and the tube to let woman sit down, which is a thing even them Englishmen don't do. And when he dress, you think it some Englishman going to work in the city. Bowler and umbrella, and briefcase tuck under the arm, with *The Times* fold up in the pocket so the name would show, and he walking upright like if is he alone who alive in the world. Only thing, Harris face black.³¹

In contrast, Five Past Twelve, who got his nickname because he was always a bit late, lives like he is still in the West Indies.

Five have woman all over London, and no sooner he hit the big city then he fly round by Moses to find out what happening, which part have fete and so on. For Five like a fete too bad. The time when the Lord Mayor did driving through London, it had a steel band beating pan all in the Circus, and you should know Five was in the front jumping up as if a West Indian carnival.³²

The reference is to the Lord Mayor's Show, which Selvon describes as a staid ceremony to which Londoners respond with polite respect. Most West Indian immigrants, in the

³⁰Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 12.

³¹Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 95.

³²Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 94-95.

novel and in Selvon's own experience, fall somewhere between these two extremes of behavior, working hard, trying to fit in and become successful.

The novel concludes with Moses reflecting on the reality of life for most West Indians in London.

“Under the kiff-kiff laughter, behind the ballad and the episode, the what-happening, the summer-is-hearts, he could see a great aimlessness a great restless, swaying movement that leaving you standing in the same spot . . . As if, on the surface, things don't look so bad, but when you go down a little, you bounce up a kind of misery and pathos and a frightening – what? . . . As if the boys laughing because they afraid to cry, they only laughing because to think so much about everything would be a big calamity.”³³

Moses dreams of returning to his island because London is

“a lonely miserable city, if it was that we didn't get together to talk about things back home we would suffer like hell. Here is not like home where you does have friends all about. . . . Nobody in London does really accept you. They tolerate you but you can't go in their house and eat or sit down and talk. It ain't have no sort of family life for us here.”³⁴

In a 1955 interview on the BBC's *Caribbean Voices*, Selvon talked about the prejudice and hardships he encountered in London. He said he sometimes dreamed of returning to Trinidad, but in the five years he had spent in London he had gotten accustomed to life there.³⁵ In a 1986 interview Selvon described the sense of being West Indian that emerged when he went to England.

What happens when you go abroad to a place like London is that you are completely isolated and therefore you have to herd together. The people in England do not say we are ten Trinidadians or Jamaicans or Antiguans they say there

³³Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 141-142.

³⁴Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 100.

³⁵Selvon, *Foreday Morning*, 166-176.

is a bunch of black people from the Caribbean. They lump you together, so you find in yourself a feeling that never existed in the Caribbean, because when you are in the Caribbean, you are isolated in your own island. There is no place where all the people from the Caribbean can meet.³⁶

The Lonely Londoners detailed the development of this West Indian attitude. In the same 1986 interview Selvon acknowledged that the characters were based on the traits of real people he knew. Moses reflected Selvon's own experience. Although he suffered from the same racial discrimination when he first arrived in London, his literary success allowed him to live comfortably and brought him a measure of respect. Generally, he was comfortable in London and available to help others survive.

In the novel Moses described the type of West Indians who came to London. Galahad was full of optimism, as they all were at first because they believed they belonged there, but Moses knew they would find only disappointment. Harris talked and acted like an Englishman but his black face insured that he would never be accepted as an equal. Five Past Twelve lived like he was still in the Caribbean. Moses made it clear that no matter what they did they were not accepted as British and never would be. Just as in Lamming's *The Emigrants*, Selvon's West Indians remained in London despite their disappointment because they believed they were British and deserved a chance to achieve financial security; the islands offered them no hope for the future anyway.

The Lonely Londoners received little critical attention when it was published. The reviews that were written looked only at the book's literary qualities. In one contemporary review, though, Whitney Balliett said the book presented "a blessedly

³⁶Frank Birbalsingh, ed., *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 63-64.

balanced realism.”³⁷ Gwendolen Freeman, another reviewer, said that the novel “consists of a number of character-sketches of eccentrics. . . . Mr. Selvon suggests that once the West Indian has been for some years in London he will never go back, though there is no future for him in an alien land.”³⁸ Neither reviewer dealt with the role the novel might play in the West Indian search for identity or political independence. It would be several years before West Indian novelists gained widespread popularity in England.

Roger Mais approached the problem of respect for the West Indian artist in the islands from a different perspective. He focused on a West Indian sculptor who chose not to leave but who found little support for his work. Mais himself said that he did not suffer from discrimination in Jamaica because of his decision to write novels, but he did complain about the indifference of most West Indians to local authors. He chose to move to England in 1952 when the British company Jonathan Cape decided to publish his first novel, *The Hills Were Joyful Together*.³⁹

In *Black Lightning* (1955), Jake, the protagonist, lives in a small Jamaican village that Mais portrays as idyllic.⁴⁰ Jake is the village blacksmith and sculptor who dreams of being independent in his life and art.

There were times when Jake . . . used to take long walks by himself into the woods, and he knew . . . that feeling of being withdrawn from the world. He got the same feeling from being alone with his carving. Healing went with it, and a sense of stillness and peace. And a feeling too that a man is alone in the world and sufficient, and not dependent upon anyone.⁴¹

³⁷Whitney Balliett, “Moses in the Old Brit’n,” *New Yorker* 33 (January 18, 1958): 100.

³⁸Gwendolen Freeman, “Review of *The Lonely Londoners*,” *Times Literary Supplement* (December 21, 1956): 761.

³⁹Karina Williamson, “Roger Mais: West Indian Novelist,” *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 2 (December 1966): 141.

⁴⁰Roger Mais, *Black Lightning* (London: Heinemann, [1955] 1983).

⁴¹Mais, *Black Lightning*, 90-91.

When two villagers tell him that being a blacksmith and sculptor is beneath his education and social status, Jake is upset. He responds, “I might have found other things to do that I like better, that would bring more money, perhaps; but nothing that would have served the needs of a greater number of people.”⁴² Jake is determined to prove his value; he does not want to appear dependent on anyone.

As the novel opens Jake is at work on a carving of Samson, the Biblical figure who took pride in his strength, but Jake can not get it right. The final image that he creates is of a blinded Samson leaning on a little boy for strength. The figure portrays suffering, dependence, and need, not the positive image of strength Jake had intended. When he asks his friend Amos to describe what he sees, Amos responds,

“I see what you mean. It ain’t Samson anymore, is what you mean; ain’t it?”

“What is it then?” tensely. “Tell me. Perhaps you can tell me.”⁴³

Shortly after their conversation Jake is blinded by lightning and becomes dependent on Amos and his wife and the whole community he had hoped to leave behind. Jake descends into a deep depression, chops up his sculpture, and gives it to his housekeeper to use for firewood.

Mais contrasts Jake’s dilemma as an artist with the developing relationship between Glen and Miriam. The lovers are minor characters in the novel who Mais uses to show a normal developing love relationship that contrasts with Jake’s struggles. In the end, Jake goes to the woods to commit suicide while Glen and Miriam are there to commit to each other.

⁴²Mais, *Black Lightning*, 101.

⁴³Mais, *Black Lightning*, 112.

“The wood is so full of peace . . . If I had to die, I think I would like to die here.”
“Yes, Glen. We want to live . . . for a long, long time.”⁴⁴

Then they hear a gunshot in the distance; Jake has taken his own life.

Mais was familiar with the plight of the author who chose to write in the West Indies; he wrote all of his novels in Jamaica. He spent a brief period of time in England but returned home when he was diagnosed with cancer. Yet in *Black Lightning* he was less critical than Lamming was of the lack of support at home for artists. Lamming believed he had to leave Trinidad in order to be a successful writer; he placed the blame on West Indian attitudes, not his own. Mais was a success; the fear of failure or lack of opportunity did not concern him. He left when his first book was accepted by a British publisher and returned only when he became ill. Still, Mais mentioned that the villagers believed Jake could have been more successful doing something else. It was Jake who did not want to be dependent on a village that did not understand him. Jake’s attitude was more reminiscent of Lamming’s, James’s, or Mendes’s in the 1930s than of Mais’s in 1955; writers of the 1930s all believed that it was essential to leave the West Indies in order to be successful. Nonetheless, Jake’s dilemma indicated that Mais was aware of the problems facing local artists.

This novel attracted no contemporary critique during Mais’s lifetime possibly because it was published just before he died. It was not until West Indian writers in general gained widespread notice that critics went back and assessed Mais’s work as well.

The plight of the artist attracted these authors because it was their particular problem. In fact they dealt with three issues in their novels. First, even though Selvon

⁴⁴Mais, *Black Lightning*, 221.

and Mais achieved success at home, they realized that most West Indians did not value what they did for the living. The literacy rate on the islands was low and the majority of rural peasants and urban slum dwellers, who made up most of the population of the islands, struggled daily to survive. They had no money to buy books and no time to read them. In London Selvon achieved more fame and general acceptance as an author than he could have back home. Mais did as well; he published three books before he died. There was no reason to believe that Mais would have returned to Jamaica if he had not gotten ill.

Second, for many writers, staying on the islands meant that they would have to supplement their income in order to be financially secure. Lamming published poetry and short stories and heard his work read on the BBC, but it was not enough; he still had to work as a teacher to supplement his income. He concluded that if he wanted to get a book published, he had to go where the publishers were – London. If he wanted to have his books read, he must go where there was a large reading public – London. Lamming believed London was the only place he would achieve success as a writer.

Third, although Selvon and Lamming became successful and famous, they were still West Indians in London and could relate to the problems others from their islands suffered. As West Indians they suffered from the same discrimination. They struggled to find work while they wrote their first novels and searched for publishers. West Indians in Britain kept in touch with each other; both Lamming and Selvon heard about the struggles of West Indians from all walks of life.

Political and Social Leaders at Home

While writers were dealing with their sense of alienation in London, they also began to question what was happening politically in the West Indies. They came to believe that many of the local men who aspired to political office under new Constitutions and expanded suffrage appeared to be much like the British who were leaving. They believed local leaders were unaware of, or unconcerned with, the problems of most West Indians and that they schemed and bribed their way into office in order to get rich. West Indian literature began to reflect these new local concerns which would become even more important to the next generation of writers.

In 1958 Lamming's third novel, *Of Age and Innocence*, appeared.⁴⁵ The book is set on the fictional island of San Cristobal, which could have been any West Indian island with its multiracial population, geographic features, and European-derived place names. The novel focuses on the West Indian desire for unity and independence, but is critical of independence movements and the men who lead them.

At the beginning of the novel we meet Mark Kennedy, a black man who is returning to the island after many years in England. His friend, Bill Butterfield, volunteers that Mark "has lived away from San Cristobal for twenty years and he was never really at home in England."⁴⁶ He is returning to an island that has changed over the years. San Cristobal is on the verge of its first election under universal adult suffrage. "Tis the first time every son o' man goin' vote in San Cristobal. . . . Education or no education, property or no property."⁴⁷ Personally, Mark struggles to understand his past.

⁴⁵George Lamming, *Of Age and Innocence* (London: Michael Joseph, 1958).

⁴⁶Lamming, *Of Age and Innocence*, 46.

⁴⁷Lamming, *Of Age and Innocence*, 82.

On San Cristobal, Isaac Shephard and his allies Singh and Lee are the leaders of the multiracial People's Communal Movement. Shephard, whom Lamming portrays as something of a fanatic, works to unite islanders against colonial authority. After one speech an opponent describes his effectiveness. Shephard

wanted each group to get an idea of who they were and they must include where they originally came from. When he had planted that in their heads one and for all, what did he do next? He showed them that there was no difference between them, Indian, Negro, Chinese, or what you like, in their relation to people like me and the Governor and what he calls the fellows at Whitehall. That's what he made clear, and there isn't a soul in San Cristobal, literate or illiterate, young or old, who didn't understand what he was saying. Whatever differences there was between them, they had one thing in common: a colonial past with all that it implies.⁴⁸

Mark becomes a supporter of Shephard, whom he had known as a child.

The People's Communal Movement chooses to use violence against colonialism on San Cristobal. Each character bases his decision on something different, because their historical backgrounds are different. Shephard, a descendant of slaves, is torn between his commitment to nationalism and his need to win the approval of the British. Singh, an East Indian, and Lee, of Chinese descent, are not the products of slavery; their ancestors had come to the island as indentured servants. They find it easier to challenge British authority without the need to cooperate with the rulers because they never considered the British their masters. As Singh says, "The point is that we must never trust them. That is like a golden rule in this movement."⁴⁹ They all agree on that.

When they gather to make plans for the upcoming elections, the meeting is interrupted by Bill, Mark's white English friend who also supports the movement. He

⁴⁸Lamming, *Of Age and Innocence*, 167.

⁴⁹Lamming, *Of Age and Innocence*, 246.

has learned of a plot to kill Shephard just before the elections but he does not know who is behind it. Although he has come to warn them about the plot against Shephard's life, it is Shephard who cannot trust Bill completely. Because he is British, Shephard's past experience has taught him not to rely on the British for anything. Singh and Lee begin to distrust Shephard when he refuses to believe the British might be behind the plot to kill him; they think it might imply that he is collaborating with the colonial government in order to get elected.

The novel ends in violence that is racially motivated. Baboo, an Indian, kills Shephard so that Singh, a fellow Indian, can get the chance to lead San Cristobal; "Was only for you, Singh, was only for you I do it . . ." ⁵⁰ The local police accuse Bill, the Englishman, and Mark, the local who spent so much time in England, of murder; the people believe they are pawns of the British because of their British associations. Lee and Singh, who believe they are innocent, help Bill and Mark to escape. Singh eventually is arrested for helping them escape. British troops are sent to the island to help maintain order. The people become disillusioned and feel cheated; it seems that their local leaders have disappointed them and the British are still in control.

Lamming noted elsewhere that he intended the novel to show that, "colonialism is the very base and structure of the West Indian's cultural awareness. . . . In order to change [his] way of seeing, the West Indian must change the very structure, the very basis of his values."⁵¹ At the beginning of the novel Lamming explained that Mark was returning to San Cristobal after years in England because he was never comfortable there. Mark had not found a new identity; he came home to try to discover himself in San

⁵⁰Lamming, *Of Age and Innocence*, 384.

⁵¹Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, 35-36.

Cristobal. Lamming also described the book as his “first political novel . . . which looks at the kinds of struggle that would be taking place in what were the last stages of the colonial experience. It is about people getting ready to rule, and the problems that are going to come up.”⁵²

The novel showed ethnic groups vying for political power. Cooperative ventures like the one formed by Shephard, Singh, and Lee were fraught with problems, not the least of which was a lack of trust. Some activists, like Baboo, would go to any lengths to secure power. Lamming knew these political candidates first-hand. He was born and raised in Barbados and lived in Trinidad for four years. Neither island had the stable two-party political system that Jamaica enjoyed. In the late 1940s while Lamming was in Trinidad the island was in political chaos. After World War II parties were formed to run candidates for election. Once the election was over, however, the parties disbanded. Workers often supported parties that appeal to them as workers, rather than ethnic entities. So Trinidadian labor leader Uriah Butler could successfully appeal to both blacks and East Indians as sugar and oil workers, much like Shephard, Singh, and Lee could ally. Lamming shows, however, that these ethnic groups never trusted each other fully. The history of blacks and East Indians in Trinidad had not made them natural allies. Even generations after the event, blacks blamed East Indians for allowing plantations to survive by working as indentured laborers.⁵³ *Of Age and Innocence* documented the political chaos and difficult decisions activists encountered in 1940s Trinidad.

⁵²Birbalsingh, ed., *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English*, 19.

⁵³For details of the political situation in Trinidad in the 1940s and early 50s, see Chapter 4.

Of Age and Innocence received little critical attention when it was published in England. British novelist Arthur Calder-Marshall called the book a “fusion of reality and symbolism” in a contemporary review, but believed it was very difficult to grasp Lamming’s intent.⁵⁴ In a review written in 1981 when the book was re-released, Valentine Cunningham, a professor of literature at Oxford, said,

The tough political analysis that made the presentation of San Cristobal, a colonized island seething and erupting with hatred of its British masters, so telling in the 1950s, still has progressive bite. It is [the story of] the bland myopias and hypocrisies of the British who insist on gratitude from their subjects for the gifts and benefactions colonialism has bestowed, while they scrabble tooth and nail by any means, open and deceitful, to retain their authority.⁵⁵

Cunningham’s more perceptive view of the significance of the book to West Indian realities appeared at a time when West Indian authors had become more familiar to the reading public of both Britain and the West Indies.

Lamming’s *Season of Adventure* (1960), a sequel to *Of Age and Innocence*, also deals with his fictionalized emerging Caribbean nation.⁵⁶ San Cristobal is independent now, but power resides with a new native ruling elite shaped by colonialism and is divorced from the working class and the peasants. Lamming introduces the division between these groups by using the Ceremony of the Souls, a ceremony based on the islanders’ African past. The Ceremony of the Souls is a Haitian ritual in which the living must bring to light past misdeeds and accept responsibility for them, in order to make

⁵⁴Arthur Calder-Marshall, “Time and Change,” *Times Literary Supplement* (November 21, 1958): 669.

⁵⁵Valentine Cunningham, “The Colonizing Word,” *Times Literary Supplement* (September 4, 1981): 1000.

⁵⁶George Lamming, *Season of Adventure* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, [1960] 1999).

their peace with the dead.⁵⁷ The middle class prefer to forget the ceremony's origins and purpose. Islanders living in the poorest parts of the island use the ceremony to celebrate their survival after slavery, much as they use the modern-day steel drum bands to celebrate the survival of the West Indian peasant mentality.

Fola is the novel's middle-class Creole heroine. She witnesses the ceremony at the beginning of the novel and is shocked to find her connection to the peasant society from which her upbringing has distanced her; "she was a stranger within her own forgotten past."⁵⁸ Her stepfather, a black man named Piggott, is the chief of police, a figure of the new authority on San Cristobal. Fola, though, is searching for her roots by looking for her real father. She challenges her stepfather; "All right, you say he's dead . . . Who was he Piggy, tell me, Piggy, who was my father?"⁵⁹ He will not tell her. He does not know who her father is, but he will not explain that to her because he wants her to acknowledge that he is her father still, as he always has been.

Fola spends the rest of the novel searching for her roots in the Forest Reserve, home to the poor, peasant community. Lamming uses her search to emphasize the conflict between the peasants and the elite, who want to suppress the steel bands and African-based ceremonies that give the lower class its identity. Two inhabitants of the Forest Reserve play key roles, Chiki, the artist, and Gort, the steelbandsman. They claim to disavow politics; Chiki says, "politics is not my business."⁶⁰ They have considerable influence in the community, though, from which they derive their inspiration. Chiki helps Fola on her quest. Gort will lead the protest later in the novel.

⁵⁷Munro, "George Lamming," 265.

⁵⁸Lamming, *Season of Adventure*, 22.

⁵⁹Lamming, *Season of Adventure*, 127.

⁶⁰Lamming, *Season of Adventure*, 324.

As she pursues her goal, Fola's animosity toward her family increases. She comes to see them as pawns of the British, trying to get ahead in the new nation of San Cristobal by relying on tribute to the former rulers rather than loyalty to the people who elect them and need their help. The authorities use the assassination of Vice President Raymond as an excuse to try to shut down peasant protest. Chiki, the artist from the Reserve, proclaims, "A proper way to rule . . . the poor outside the law, and if you outside the law you get priority attention when the law in search o' some criminal."⁶¹

There is little sadness among the people over the death of a man concerned only about his future, not theirs or the island's. "A formal mourning had been imposed on the town. Flags flew half-mast over the public buildings. There was a special mass in the Catholic cathedral. But the public grief hadn't stirred anyone to eloquence about Raymond's virtues."⁶² Fola decides to side with the peasants, especially when she learns that her father comes from the Forest Reserve. When the government, whose members Lamming does not describe individually, issues a proclamation banning the steel drums, steelbandmen from across the island gather at Freedom Square, led by Gort, to play the drums. The government falls.

Kofi James-Williams Baako, a native of San Cristobal who has studied medicine at Cambridge and leader of an opposition not described in the novel, takes over power as the new president until new elections can be held. He is of mixed European and African descent, more removed from association with the British, but still unclear about the future direction the island should take. "Time and again [Baako] would insist that a new republic like San Cristobal, made backward by a large illiterate peasantry, and weaned

⁶¹Lamming, *Season of Adventure*, 267.

⁶²Lamming, *Season of Adventure*, 303.

into complacency by a commercial middle-class that had no power in the world which organised its money; such places were in a state of emergency, an emergency which was no less exacting and no less dangerous than emergencies caused by war.”⁶³ He is enraged by the proclamation that the previous government issued against the drums. He argues that the men who had just been overthrown thought of independence as their final accomplishment. To Baako, a member of the next generation, “freedom, it’s only then the problem begins.”⁶⁴

In an interview in 1972 Lamming said that he got the idea of using the Ceremony of the Souls as the center of his novel while he was visiting Haiti doing research for an article for *Holiday Magazine*, an American travel publication.⁶⁵ In another interview he claimed he wrote *Season of Adventure* to show that independence governments were collapsing because they had no base; they had not gained the support of the working and peasant classes.⁶⁶ In the novel Piggott and the other middle-class leaders were intended to portray West Indian leaders who had succeeded to office hoping to gain power and wealth as the British leaders before them had. Once in office, they cooperated with the British and ignored the needs of the poorest islanders. Grantley Adams of Barbados and Albert Gomes of Trinidad were accused by their successors of fitting Lamming’s mold, but there is no evidence that he knew them personally. Lamming would have been familiar with both of them from his life in the West Indies. Fola, who attended the Ceremony of the Souls out of curiosity, was shocked to find that it affected her. She realized that she was connected to the rural population in ways she had never known.

⁶³Lamming, *Season of Adventure*, 322.

⁶⁴Lamming, *Season of Adventure*, 325.

⁶⁵Munro and Sander, eds., *Kas-Kas*, 17.

⁶⁶Birbalsingh, ed., *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English*, 19.

She set off on a quest to find herself by searching for her real father. The more she explored, the more she connected to her rural roots and moved away from her middle-class family and friends. In a different story line, when the new government banned the steel bands, the lower class rebelled and the government fell. Lamming made it clear that true progress in the West Indies had to reach all the people. He then introduced the new leader, the Cambridge-educated West Indian Kofi James-Williams Baako. Lamming was writing *The Season of Adventure* as Eric Williams was coming to power in Trinidad. The name of Lamming's fictional leader, especially "James-Williams," would seem to indicate that Lamming believed that the Oxford-educated Williams, with the support of his friend C.L.R. James, offered new hope in Trinidad.

A review by Anthony Cronin noted Lamming's "lectures on politics and freedom and his heavily symbolic plot" but did not attempt to put the novel into a political context.⁶⁷ This was the only contemporary review of the novel. This was the last of Lamming's four novels that traced the history of the Caribbean up to that time. He claimed that there was "no further point for me to go without in a sense going beyond what had actually happened in the society."⁶⁸ His statement indicated that Lamming believed he was accurately portraying the situation as he saw it in the West Indies.

V. S. Naipaul also takes a closer look at West Indian politics through the election process in *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958), about the second elections to be held in 1950 in Elvira, which he describes as the most backward part of the island of Trinidad.⁶⁹ He contrasts the ideal of democratic elections with the reality of the event on the island.

⁶⁷Anthony Cronin, "A Place for Everything," *Times Literary Supplement* (November 11, 1960): 721.

⁶⁸George E. Kent, "A Conversation with George Lamming," *Black World* 22 (March 1973), 96.

⁶⁹V.S. Naipaul, *Three Novels: The Mystic Masseur, The Suffrage of Elvira, Miguel Street* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982).

Elvira is a corrupt society where East Indian values and general religious traditions have both broken down. Gaining wealth has become the main goal of the people and those who obtain it, no matter how, are applauded. Politicians pursue power for its own sake and the money it will bring, not with any desire to improve society or help people. In an interview conducted by Derek Walcott, a poet from St. Lucia, Naipaul said, “In the old colonial society there was an element of aspiration. This was the motive of society. . . . We aimed high and we produced a lot of bright people . . . but I feel . . . that aspiration has been dropped, that the manners of the proletariat have infiltrated the values of the rest of society.”⁷⁰ *The Suffrage of Elvira* represents that point of view.

Naipaul presents Elvira as a typical small Trinidadian outpost. “Things were crazily mixed up in Elvira. Everybody, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians, owned a Bible; the Hindus and Muslims looking on it, if anything, with greater awe.”⁷¹ Everybody celebrates all religious holidays. “In fact, when Elvira was done with religious festivals, there were few straight days left.”⁷²

Baksh is the Muslim leader of the community, although he knows little about his own religion. He has power to deliver the Muslim vote, though, so Surujpat Harbans from Port of Spain, one of the candidates for Legislative Council, hires him for \$75 a month to deliver it. Chittaranjan, a Hindu, is the richest man in Elvira. Harbans makes a deal with him to deliver the majority of the Hindu vote. One of their campaign slogans is

⁷⁰Derek Walcott, “Interview with V.S. Naipaul,” *Sunday Guardian*, March 7, 1965, from Jussawalla, ed., *Conversations*, 6.

⁷¹Naipaul, *The Suffrage of Elvira*, 230.

⁷²Naipaul, *The Suffrage of Elvira*, 280.

“Vote Harbans or Die!”⁷³ Nobody pays much attention to it, though, because they vote the way their leaders tell them.

Harbans’s opponent is Preacher Thomas, a local black man, who commands the black vote and some of the Hindu vote, because he “help out a lot of Hindu people in this place.”⁷⁴ Preacher makes house-to-house visits to give aid for free, hoping to get votes. So, Harbans visits the Hindu sick too, giving them money in order to convince them to vote for him.

Harbans is the worst campaigner; “his moods, his exultations, depressions and rages, was an embarrassment to his committee. They wished him out of the way.”⁷⁵ However, on election day Harbans provides food for voters. He bribes workers at the polling place to make the process go smoothly for his supporters. Nearly eighty-three per cent of eligible voters turn out. Harbans wins easily. He “spent the rest of that night settling his bills . . . And when all that was done, Harbans left Elvira, intending never to return.”⁷⁶

Although Naipaul wrote the novel as a parody of West Indian politics, it reflected accurately the racial divisions in Trinidadian politics in 1956. Eric Williams, leader of the PNM was identified as pro-black and anti-Indian. The PDP, the opposition party, was made up of East Indians. Even when the PDP merged with other opposition parties and became the Democratic Labour Party (DLP), most Trinidadians continued to identify it as pro-Indian. When the DLP won a majority of available seats in the 1957 Federal

⁷³Naipaul, *The Suffrage of Elvira*, 206.

⁷⁴Naipaul, *The Suffrage of Elvira*, 214.

⁷⁵Naipaul, *The Suffrage of Elvira*, 308.

⁷⁶Naipaul, *The Suffrage of Elvira*, 343.

parliamentary elections, Williams called East Indians a “recalcitrant and hostile minority because they refused to support his political agenda.”⁷⁷

In a 1958 article Naipaul addressed another aspect of the novel when he wrote that in Trinidad “respectability and class still mean very little. Money means a good deal more.”⁷⁸ *The Suffrage of Elvira* represented this attitude. Clearly, Harbans, an East Indian Hindu, wanted to get elected just for power and money. He had no intention of actually representing the people of the region who were East Indian and black; he had no intention of even returning to Elvira until the next elections. Naipaul displayed the same critical attitude as Lamming toward the first group of political leaders who came to power for their own sake.

In the only contemporary review of the novel Marigold Johnson recommended the book as worth reading, but she did not detail any political or cultural significance the novel might have.⁷⁹ Although Naipaul was well-known in England by this time, his novels of the West Indies still failed to attract as much critical analysis as might be expected given his fame.

West Indian authors wrote about what they knew best, their homes. They were determined to have an influence on the political and cultural developments taking place back home. Lamming clearly perceived it as his role to take a critical look at how the islands were developing politically. Naipaul’s goal was to portray East Indians as out of touch with Trinidadian society. What they both showed in their novels was corruption by government officials and lack of trust among competing ethnic groups. Unfortunately,

⁷⁷Hassan, V.S. *Naipaul*, 21.

⁷⁸V.S. Naipaul, “The Regional Barrier,” *Times Literary Supplement* (August 15, 1958): 37.

⁷⁹Marigold Johnson, “Tropical Heat,” *Times Literary Supplement* (May 2, 1958): 237.

the next generation of West Indian writers would find many of the same problems still existing.

Conclusion

In this chapter we looked at two of the issues that were of concern to West Indian writers, their experiences in London, and the corruption of native political leaders. The West Indian experience in London was crucial to the development of West Indian literature. For Lamming it had been difficult to make a living at home where his literary efforts were not respected by most islanders. For Selvon, who believed he was successful in Trinidad, London offered him an opportunity to experience more of the world before he settled down. When they went to England these men found that the British treated them like foreigners. They considered themselves British, but the British did not. British prejudice astounded them and caused them to take an even more critical look at the legacy of British rule and to explore how to define themselves. Mais, who also left for England as a successful writer, also acknowledged the lack of respect that most islanders had for artists. Those few West Indians who appreciated the written word tended to read what the British wrote.

When Lamming and Naipaul turned to the political situation at home as the islands struggled to establish the Federation and develop their own local governments, they found that many of the new political leaders seemed to want to step in to replace the British rather than search for true political and economic change that benefited all the people. In their novels they presented examples of politicians who were not prepared to assume the reigns of government, but instead sought gain just for themselves. The new leaders tried to deny their connections to the peasant population that formed the majority

on the islands. Lamming showed that ethnic differences often kept islanders apart. Naipaul showed that money and connections were important elements in winning elections and that was all that concerned candidates.

Overall, the last two chapters have shown that with the appearance of Reid's *New Day*, West Indian literature was born. The tone was different; the motives for writing were different. The West Indian islands were undergoing significant political and social changes and writers responded. Reid's motive was to show people that they deserved to run their own countries. Others, like Lamming, Mais, Selvon, and Naipaul tried to awaken West Indians to the reality of their lives. All these authors held the British responsible for the situation that existed on the islands because of the history of colonial rule at the same time they recognized that it was up to West Indians to develop a sense of whom they really were and move forward to develop their own societies.

CHAPTER VII
WEST INDIAN INDEPENDENCE
1962-1980

“We Are Free”¹

The decade of the 1960s in the West Indies was characterized by political independence for some islands and economic growth with diversification and expansion in agriculture and trade, as well as an increase in factory production and real income for most of the islands. The world price inflation of the 1970s, though, led to reduced living standards and debt. The 1970s also brought political changes. The parties that had dominated until then faced increasing difficulty maintaining support. Trinidad was the only country to maintain political stability, although its government also faced pressure from its citizens. In Jamaica there was widespread political violence. This chapter will explore the changing political climate of the Caribbean in the 1960s and 1970s, focusing primarily on the countries that gained independence in those decades – Jamaica, Trinidad, and Barbados. It was the inability of the new local leadership to solve the economic and social problems of their countries that West Indian writers would attack in the novels they wrote between 1962 and 1980.

¹Anderson Peter Desir, “The Flag of My Country,” in John Figueroa, ed., *An Anthology of African and Caribbean Writing in English* (London: Heinemann, 1982), 260.

Jamaica

Jamaica gained its independence on August 6, 1962, after its people voted to leave the Federation. Alexander Bustamante became prime minister of the new nation. The independence Constitution of 1962 was the result of a collaborative effort between the two dominant political parties, Bustamante's Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) and Norman Manley's People's National Party (PNP). The prime minister and a two-house legislature ruled the country. The lower house, the House of Representatives, was elected on the basis of universal suffrage. The upper house, the Senate, was appointed; the prime minister appointed thirteen of its members and the leader of the opposition selected eight.²

The Bustamante government assured Jamaica that it would continue to promote economic and social development. It promised its investors that foreign capital would be welcomed, indeed that it was necessary if Jamaica were to achieve its goals of economic development. Although construction lagged slightly and tourism decreased by eight percent because of fears of unrest after the British government left, the JLP government saw these setbacks as temporary. Unemployment was a more immediate problem. In the past immigration to Britain had served as an outlet for the island's population. However, the Commonwealth Immigration Act, which went into effect in July 1962, drastically limited the number of immigrants entering the United Kingdom from British Commonwealth countries.³

²*Times* (London), April 12, 1962, 11; *New York Times*, February 2, 1962, 5; Philip Sherlock and Hazel Bennett, *The Story of the Jamaican People* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle, 1998), 398-399; Carl Stone, *Class, State, and Democracy in Jamaica* (New York: Praeger, 1986), 11-12.

³"Lowering the Union Jack," *Time* 80 (August 17, 1962): 30; Samuel J. Hurwitz and Edith F. Hurwitz, *Jamaica: A Historical Portrait* (New York: Praeger, 1971), 233-235.

By 1963 there were signs of improvement in the Jamaican economy. Agricultural exports increased, building construction increased, the tourist trade rebounded, and manufacturing grew. In the same year the government announced a Five-Year Independence Plan that called for a combination of private and public initiatives aimed at improving the economic and social conditions of the island and allocated \$255 million to accomplish its goals. Specifically, money went to improve education, health services, agriculture, and transportation. To increase foreign investment, the government called for tax incentives. Twenty-three new industries took advantage of the tax incentives.⁴

The economy grew every year through 1967, but agriculture remained a problem. In 1965 it was the largest employer on the island, but it accounted for less than twelve percent of gross domestic product. The government tried to improve the situation by creating the Land Development and Utilization Commission to compel cultivation of idle or underutilized land of fifty acres or more. In 1963 the government had estimated that between 150,000 and 200,000 acres of land, divided into farms of one hundred acres or more, were idle or underutilized. If owners failed to put the land to use the Commission could buy or lease the land and rent it to farmers, who, after several years of effective cultivation, could purchase the land for themselves.⁵

In January 1967 Bustamante resigned at the age of eighty-three because of poor health. New elections were held in February. In the campaign of 1967 Manley committed the PNP to strongly socialist proposals, including more government programs to aid the people directly and a new land settlement policy intended to help small farmers. In the weeks leading up to the elections serious violence broke out in what became

⁴“The Year After,” *Time* 82 (December 6, 1963): 49; Hurwitz and Hurwitz, *Jamaica*, 235-237.

⁵“Race with Unrest,” *Time* 84 (October 30, 1964): 50; Hurwitz and Hurwitz, *Jamaica*, 240-241.

known as the West Kingston War. It began when protestors at a JLP rally began throwing rocks; one hit the Minister of Development and Welfare, who was only slightly injured. The unrest escalated from there as supporters of the two parties used guns and systematic violence to achieve political dominance. The JLP claimed it was protecting itself against PNP supporters. The PNP accused the JLP of instigating the violence. The JLP government declared a state of emergency that gave the police broad power to maintain order and put in place a curfew severely limiting the ability of the parties to campaign. When the PNP lost the election in a close popular vote – JLP, 50.7% and PNP 49.3% - the party blamed the government’s use of the state of emergency. In the House, the JLP gained thirty seats to the PNP’s twenty and Donald Sangster became prime minister. He would hold office for only seven weeks before dying of a brain hemorrhage; Hugh Shearer replaced him as prime minister. Shearer was a long-time JLP member, who had worked to gain labor support since the 1940s. After independence he had served as government spokesman and foreign affairs adviser. In that capacity, he headed the Jamaican delegation to the United Nations.⁶

Shearer continued to follow Bustamante’s Five Year Plan. In 1968 the Jamaican Congress passed the National Insurance Law, which put in place old age and disability insurance financed by employers and workers. Benefits included old age pensions, medical care, and cash payments of fifty percent of earnings for disabilities resulting from the job. Benefits also went to widows and orphans.⁷

⁶Michael Manley, *Jamaica: Struggle in the Periphery* (London: Third World Media Ltd., 1982), 122, 169-170; Hurwitz and Hurwitz, *Jamaica*, 219-225.

⁷Hurwitz and Hurwitz, *Jamaica*, 246.

Tourism continued to grow. In 1969 almost 378,000 tourists visited Jamaica, compared to 300,000 in 1965. Jamaica encouraged continued development by enlarging airport facilities and increasing the number of hotel rooms.⁸

By the 1960s Jamaica's economic ties to Britain were in decline, while those to the United States increased. In 1968 United States imports had grown to thirty-nine percent; those from Britain were twenty percent. Jamaica maintained ties with other Commonwealth countries, too, especially Canada. Shearer expanded Jamaica's economic reach, developing economic relationships with other European countries, including France, West Germany, the Netherlands, and Yugoslavia. He became the first Jamaican head of state to visit other South American and Caribbean countries when he went to the Netherlands Antilles, Surinam, Guyana, and Trinidad in 1968. In 1970 Jamaica sent an ambassador to Ethiopia, establishing its first formal relations with an African country.⁹

In 1968 the islands established CARIFTA, the Caribbean Free Trade Association. Although the attempt at a political alliance, the West Indies Federation, had failed, there was a recent history of cooperation among the islands, most notably the Caribbean Commission launched in the 1940s. Most island leaders believed that economic cooperation would benefit the region. For example, Jamaica hoped that within a few years CARIFTA countries would absorb ten percent of its total exports. In 1973, Jamaica, Trinidad, and Barbados left CARIFTA and formed CARICOM, the Caribbean Community and Common Market, which established a common external tariff, a system

⁸“Wide Open,” *Time* 89 (February 3, 1967): 30; “His Own Man,” *Time* 89 (March 3, 1967): 38; Hurwitz and Hurwitz, *Jamaica*, 248.

⁹Michael Manley, *The Politics of Change: A Jamaican Testament* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1975), 232; Manley, *Jamaica*, 66; Stone, *Class*, 43.

of fiscal incentives for industry, taxation agreements, and a Caribbean Investment Corporation to channel equity funds to the less developed member countries. By 1974 the other members of CARIFTA ended that association and joined CARICOM.¹⁰

Although Jamaica had made great strides by 1970, the island still had at least fifteen to twenty percent of the population that it classified as unemployed or underemployed. In addition the problem of functional illiteracy left a large part of the population without the most basic skills and thus unemployable.¹¹

Foreign investment was a source of concern to the opposition, the PNP. In 1970, twenty-four percent of industry was owned by Jamaicans alone, as opposed to ten percent in 1962. About forty percent of industry was under joint Jamaican-foreign control on an equal partnership basis. Still, foreign nationals owned thirty-three percent exclusively. The remainder was owned in part by Jamaicans, but with foreigners exercising majority control. The JLP government was happy with the mix, though, and continued to encourage foreign investment.¹²

The JLP did want to wrest as much economic power from the entrenched private sector as possible. It insisted on minimal ownership by Jamaicans in financial institutions to begin a process of what it called economic nationalism; the term nationalism was used to refer to anything that promoted Jamaica or Jamaicans after independence. The government's aggressive policy of collecting income taxes also alienated members of the

¹⁰Manley, *Politics of Change*, 232; Manley, *Jamaica*, 66; *Times* (London), June 28, 1973, 6; Stone, *Class*, 43; Hurwitz and Hurwitz, *Jamaica*, 227-229.

¹¹Hurwitz and Hurwitz, *Jamaica*, 257.

¹²Hurwitz and Hurwitz, *Jamaica*, 252-253.

wealthy private sector, many of whom were British. Private sector support began to shift to the PNP as the 1972 elections approached.¹³

In the late 1960s, Jamaica had to deal with a new issue, the rise of the Black Power movement. In the Caribbean, Black Power, an ideology imported from the United States, represented the desire of blacks for political and economic autonomy. It rejected white control of any aspect of society. Jamaica faced its first Black Power crisis when supporters of the movement rioted in Kingston in October 1968. The Kingston riots forced the Shearer government to declare a state of emergency. The government blamed Walter Rodney, a Guyanese lecturer in history at the University of the West Indies, for encouraging the revolt. Rodney had given a series of lectures in the slums of West Kingston promoting the assumption of power by the black masses. When Rodney left the country in October 1968 to attend the Congress of Black Writers in Montreal, Shearer refused to let him return. Jamaicans rioted again. Shearer's response was to remind Jamaicans that they had a black government and universal suffrage.¹⁴

In 1969 the PNP also underwent significant changes. Manley resigned as leader of the party. His son Michael was elected to the position and also assumed the role of leader of the opposition in parliament. Manley was a graduate of the University of London and a former pilot in the Canadian Air Force who had spent the years since independence as a union organizer for the PNP. Manley took the party beyond the social democratic tradition it had espoused since its founding by his father. Announcing that he wanted to end neocolonialism and economic dependency in Jamaica, he said his new

¹³Stone, *Class*, 83-84.

¹⁴Colon A. Palmer, *Eric Williams and the Making of the Modern Caribbean* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 289; Alex Dupuy, "Race and Class in the Postcolonial Caribbean: The Views of Walter Rodney," *Latin American Perspectives* 23 (Spring 1996), 108.

policy would be based on his commitment to economic nationalism, in which he saw Jamaicans in charge of the local economy, and the country committed to Third World socialism. He moved away from Jamaica's previous pro-Western stance and took an activist role in North-South issues. He did not advocate a complete break with capitalism, but wanted to move the country in that direction.¹⁵ Manley explained his goals for the PNP.

We began and ended with four basic commitments . . .
Firstly, we wanted to create an economy that would be more independent of foreign control and more responsive to the needs of the majority of the people at home. Secondly, we wanted to work for an egalitarian society both in terms of opportunity and also in the deeper sense of a society in which people felt that they were of equal worth and value. Thirdly, we wanted to develop a truly democratic society in which democracy was more than the attempt to manipulate votes every five years. Finally, we wanted to help, indeed accelerate, the process by which Jamaicans were retracing the steps of their history. We were convinced that it was only through the rediscovery of our heritage that we would evolve a culture that reflected the best in ourselves because it expressed pride in what we were and where we came from.¹⁶

Voter turnout for the elections of 1972 was high, seventy-two percent. Manley and the PNP won the elections with fifty-six per cent of the popular vote. He credited the victory to the general discontent with the JLP. Jamaica in 1972 continued to have an economy that depended on foreign interests. Foreign companies owned one hundred per cent of the bauxite and aluminum industry, more than half of the sugar and tourist industries, and a significant portion of the new manufacturing businesses. Most peasants

¹⁵Manley, *Jamaica*, 39; Stone, *Class*, 152-153; Hurwitz and Hurwitz, *Jamaica*, 219, 226-227.

¹⁶Manley, *Jamaica*, 39.

continued to subsist on small plots of land; 97.8 per cent of farms took up 36.9 per cent of arable land, while 2.2 per cent occupied 63.1 per cent of arable areas.¹⁷

Manley vowed to reduce Jamaica's dependence on foreign ownership and the control of local elites, and increase direct state control of the economy. Although Manley portrayed this as a radical shift in the economic profile of the country, Jamaican policy since independence had been based on the premise that the weak business tradition in colonial Jamaica meant that the state had to play a role in developing Jamaican entrepreneurship. The JLP government had instituted protections for new industries, and tax incentives to attract foreign investments for industrial development. Yet despite his rhetoric the change that Manley actually introduced was to escalate attacks on the private sector and increase state takeovers. It was not a sharp revision of JLP policy.¹⁸

Even with a long-established two-party democratic system, elites continued to control the island. Although the trade union movement had made considerable gains, particularly in establishing minimum wages for some industries and setting up pension plans, a Jamaican could still work for a company for years and be fired for no reason with just two weeks' pay. In the 1970s, wage increases could not match price increases because of the high cost of living. As a result, the number of strikes increased.¹⁹

The owner-worker relationship in Jamaica was governed by the Master and Servants Law written in the nineteenth century. Manley wrote that "it is astonishing to reflect that during twenty-six years of representative government, ten of them as an

¹⁷Manley, *Jamaica*, 40; Manley, *Politics of Change*, 223; Carlene J. Edie, "Retrospective in Commemoration of Carl Stone: Jamaican Pioneer of Political Culture," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 39 (Summer 1997), 149; Stone, *Class*, 49.

¹⁸Manley, *Jamaica*, 41; Anders Danielson, "Economic Reforms in Jamaica," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 38 (Summer-Autumn 1996), 99-108; Stone, *Class*, 77, 84.

¹⁹Manley, *Jamaica*, 40-41; Stone, *Class*, 105-108.

independent nation, in a political system heavily influenced if not dominated by the trade union movement, we had found it possible to leave this law untouched.”²⁰ In his view it was the deeply ingrained remnants of the plantation system, slavery, colonialism, and neo-colonialism that allowed the long-established social system to survive.²¹

Manley’s government replaced the antiquated law with the Labor Relations and Industrial Disputes Act that provided an alternative to the strike and lock-out action that V.S. Naipaul described in *The Mystic Masseur*.²² Under the new law, when a dispute arose either party could request a government arbitration tribunal with binding powers to decide. The law also made it illegal for any employer to refuse to recognize and deal with a union elected by his employees. In the case of an individual termination, a worker could request that a tribunal investigate whether the actions were justified. If the tribunal determined that a worker had been dismissed unfairly, it could award compensation or reinstatement. The law banned a strike or lock-out once a tribunal had been convened.²³

The government also passed the Minimum Wage Law, which affected wages and hours. For the lowest paid workers, their pay tripled. The law also established the eight hour work day and the forty-hour work week. Beyond that, employers had to pay overtime.²⁴

The PNP government also proposed changes to the educational system that would make it more accessible to all Jamaicans. The government instituted a program of free education up to the university level, a policy it hoped would ease the problem of functional illiteracy. It also shifted the emphasis in education away from the traditional

²⁰Manley, *Jamaica*, 48.

²¹Manley, *Jamaica*, 49.

²²See Chapter 6 for details of the novel.

²³Manley, *Jamaica*, 90.

²⁴Manley, *Jamaica*, 91.

classical program toward a focus on technical training that could prepare young people for jobs.²⁵

Manley also tried to make Jamaican culture the norm. Tropical-style dress became acceptable in the workplace. The government lifted the ban on reggae music, put in place by the previous JLP administration that considered the style protest music, and lifted the ban on black power literature from the United States. These changes reflected the worries of the traditional elite about their continuing hold on Jamaican culture. According to Manley, the elite feared that “the combination of a new cultural emphasis together with experiments in democratic participation seemed part of a plan to change traditional, English-derived customs and ways of doing things.”²⁶ When the government created community councils based on a Cuban model to promote cooperation and reduce political tensions through communication, the JLP attacked these changes as Communist-influenced.²⁷

The charge that Manley and the PNP were Communist also came as a result of Manley’s commitment to cooperation with other Third World countries. According to the Prime Minister,

Our strong opposition to any infringement upon the sovereignty of a small nation and its rights was to lead us to the most controversial single aspect of our foreign policy. This was our friendship with and consistent defence of Cuba.²⁸

Manley argued that United States interference in Cuba, for instance by maintaining a military base at Guantanamo that Cuba did not want, meant that Jamaica had to be

²⁵Manley, *Politics of Change*, 228-229.

²⁶Manley, *Jamaica*, 82.

²⁷Manley, *Jamaica*, 80-82.

²⁸Manley, *Jamaica*, 69.

concerned about displeasing the United States for fear it might intervene in Jamaican affairs. Manley insisted on maintaining good relations with Cuba as part of his efforts to develop a united Third World front that could challenge the former colonial powers.²⁹

Manley's government also began the process of nationalizing some businesses. It took control of public utilities, which had been part foreign and part locally owned. It bought nearly half of the major hotels in Jamaica, most of which were foreign owned. The net effect, though, was to drive out some much needed foreign capital.³⁰ The government also took seven thousand acres of idle land, some held by the government and some bought from private owners, and brought them under cultivation, a policy the JLP had begun. At first the government operated the farms directly, but with a plan that once they were established they would be turned into co-operatives that would be owned by the people after a period of joint responsibility with the government. In a parallel project the government persuaded farmers who could not put all of their land to use to lease it to the government, which in turn leased it to farmers who needed more land. Still, most large private holdings remained intact.³¹

The government also negotiated to acquire fifty-one per cent of the bauxite mining operation, then owned by United States and Canadian firms. It also tried to negotiate a levy each company would pay the government based on the price of aluminum. Jamaica wanted 7.5 per cent of the price per ton. The companies wanted to pay three per cent. When the companies held firm, Jamaica imposed the 7.5 per cent levy

²⁹Manley, *Jamaica*, 69.

³⁰Manley, *Jamaica*, 93-94; William Schmidt, "The New Jamaica," *Newsweek* (January 12, 1976): 44; Stone, *Class*, 161.

³¹Manley, *Politics of Change*, 226-227; Schmidt, "The New Jamaica," 44; Stone, *Class*, 87, 155.

by law in 1974; Manley claimed, “They just would not offer a realistic figure.”³² Manley provided figures to prove that the bauxite deal was a good one for both parties. In 1973, the year before the levy, the four companies doing business on the island had a combined net income of US\$249.1 million. Their net income in 1974, after the levy, was US\$581.7 million. In 1973, Jamaica received US\$24.5 million for 12.5 million tons of bauxite. In 1980, Jamaica received US\$210 million for 12 million tons. Even though Manley believed that both sides benefited from the deal, he charged that when the companies retaliated by systematically reducing production. The companies argued that the worldwide market for bauxite was weak.³³

With the PNP accused of fomenting a Communist takeover because of their economic program, the party determined that it needed to redefine itself. It chose the descriptive term “democratic socialism” to characterize its program. Manley explained,

The democratic was to be given equal emphasis with the socialist, because we were committed to the maintenance of Jamaica’s traditional and constitutional plural democracy; and more importantly, because we intended to do everything in our power to deepen and broaden the democratic process of our party and in the society at large. We reaffirmed the earlier socialist commitment because of our determination to reorganise the Jamaican economy on the basis of a system of social control and popular participation. Both of these involved radical alternatives to the free enterprise model of the capitalist system.³⁴

The party clarified its commitment to democratic socialism by emphasizing that in the class alliance the working class must predominate. In terms of the mixed economy, it

³²“Battling over Bauxite,” *Time* 104 (July 8, 1974): 46.

³³Manley, *Jamaica*, 99-103; Michael Manley, *Up the Down Escalator: Development and the International Economy: A Jamaican Case Study* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1987), 50-54, 60; “Battling over Bauxite,” 46; Carl Stone, “Decolonization and the Caribbean State System: The Case of Jamaica,” in Paget Henry and Carl Stone, eds., *The Newer Caribbean: Decolonization, Democracy, and Development* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1983), 57.

³⁴Manley, *Jamaica*, 123.

stressed that the public sector would play the leading role, but the private sector was expected to contribute substantially to any effort.³⁵

The government also had to deal with the rising crime rate, which it attributed to the twenty-four per cent unemployment rate. The range of crimes committed had escalated as well. Robbery with rape and/or murder became common. After four prominent businessmen were shot, the government took steps to deal with the problem. Although it invested heavily in upgrading police equipment, salaries, and numbers, it was not enough to compensate for the lack of employment opportunities. While the government tackled the unemployment problem, it also established a home guard that was trained, armed, and operated as a neighborhood or village watch group. The Jamaican Parliament passed two pieces of legislation. Under the Suppression of Crime Act, government law-enforcement officers could conduct house-to-house searches, without warrants, looking for unlicensed guns and ammunition. If they found any, those in possession were tried under the new Gun Court Act, in a special court that was closed to the public and the press. The JLP criticized these actions, claiming that the home guard and the new legislation were the first steps in an elaborate scheme that would result in a Communist take-over of Jamaica.³⁶

Political violence was increasing as well and it had a destabilizing influence in the political arena. Gang activity intimidated the rich and middle class. Even the poor who lived in neighborhoods with high incidences of gang-related political violence were frightened and defenseless. Most of the poor urban slum dwellers did not subscribe to or support gang violence, although it was their neighbors who were to blame for much of it.

³⁵Manley, *Jamaica*, 123-128.

³⁶Manley, *Jamaica*, 83-85; "Stalag in Kingston," *Time* 104 (September 23, 1974): 55.

In 1976 Manley blamed the violence on the JLP, charging that they attacked PNP supporters in order to destabilize the island. When some police were killed, others went on strike, worsening the situation. When the Peruvian ambassador was killed in June, 1976, Manley declared a state of emergency. The JLP accused Manley of declaring the state of emergency to secure its defeat in the next elections.³⁷ Manley denied the charge saying,

the facts are clear and incontrovertible. Crime and political violence was virtually paralyzing the society. We were satisfied that a considerable proportion of what was taking place was the result of calculated provocation. We concluded . . . that the national interest demanded the strongest action that is possible under our constitution. No reasonable observer at that time could doubt that the situation in the country came entirely within the intention of the constitution in providing the emergency powers which were in fact invoked.³⁸

During the same period inflation was running at 20.6 per cent, due to world-wide problems of inflation. Unemployment rates were high, the budget deficit was large and growing, and an ever larger portion of the rural population was being forced to eke out a living as small-scale farmers on tiny plots of land.³⁹

The government held the 1976 elections as scheduled, despite the state of emergency. The JLP attacked the PNP for being Communist and failing to improve the economy. Although the economy was not strong and unemployment was high, the PNP campaigned on its record of performance arguing that its programs would bring positive improvements. According to Manley,

³⁷Manley, *Jamaica*, 141; *New York Times*, July 16, 1976, 8; *New York Times*, July 25, 1976, 153; Schmidt, "The New Jamaica," 44; Stone, *Class*, 57-58.

³⁸Manley, *Jamaica*, 141; "'Jah Kingdom Goes to Waste,'" *Time* 107 (June 28, 1976): 37.

³⁹Manley, *Jamaica*, 131-144; Danielson, "Economic Reforms," 100.

We laid great stress on the fact that all our best programmes of the last four years had been part of a general social design to make Jamaica a place in which the majority of its people, its workers, farmers, professionals and middle class would have a better life, better opportunities and, above all, a bigger share in their country.⁴⁰

The people of Jamaica obviously trusted in Manley's promises, because the PNP won forty-seven of the sixty seats in parliament and 56.8 per cent of the popular vote. The JLP received 43.2 per cent of the popular vote.⁴¹

In his second term, Manley had to confront the problems of the economy, which were the result of a number of causes, chiefly the world-wide recession brought on by the oil crisis of 1973. The high price of oil, upon which Jamaica was ninety-seven per cent dependent for energy, created significant problems. The country relied heavily on imported food, too, and food import prices soared. The imported raw materials, equipment, and spare parts that were necessary for Jamaica's manufacturing industry also saw huge price rises. Bauxite and aluminum prices fell, partly due to the world recession and partly due to what Manley believed was retaliation over the levy. Still, bauxite netted the island \$200 million or seventy per cent of its foreign income. Tourism declined sharply. Finally, sugar and banana production declined.⁴²

Jamaica turned to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for help. As a prerequisite for a loan, the IMF demanded the devaluation of the Jamaican currency by forty percent and severe budget cuts. Manley resisted. The devaluation would hurt the poor more than any other group and the budget cuts would have to come from some programs designed to aid that same group. After further negotiations, in 1977 the value

⁴⁰Manley, *Jamaica*, 146.

⁴¹Manley, *Jamaica*, 145-148; "Castro's Pal Wins Again," *Time* 108 (December 27, 1976): 24.

⁴²Manley, *Jamaica*, 149-150; "Jamaica: Manley's Mess," *The Economist* (January 20, 1979): 81.

of the Jamaican dollar was dropped by about fifteen percent and some programs were salvaged.⁴³

One criterion for the loan, though, was periodic monitoring and testing of Jamaica's economic progress by the IMF. In December 1977, Jamaica failed its test. Critics charged that the government was incapable of managing the economy and the IMF exercised its right to impose restrictions on Jamaica in 1978. The Jamaican dollar was devalued by another fifteen percent. There were further severe reductions in social programs and a stringent tax package.⁴⁴

By the late 1970s Jamaica was tied to the United States economically and culturally despite Manley's commitment to the Third World. Trade with the United States accounted for thirty-seven percent of imports and exports, while trade with Britain was only seventeen percent. Between 1970 and 1980 as many as 180,000 Jamaicans migrated to the United States compared with 17,000 to Britain. More Jamaican students now traveled to the United States for their education than to Britain. This migration resulted in increased travel between Jamaica and the United States by friends and relatives of the émigrés, which in turn led to a significant level of social and political influence from the United States, including drug use, and the desire for consumer goods manifested by all classes.⁴⁵

New elections were scheduled for 1980. The economy had not rebounded. Oil prices rose thirty per cent in 1979 alone. Unemployment stood at twenty-five per cent. Poverty had increased steadily since 1973. Economic and social frustration was evident in the middle and working classes. Violence mounted as the elections approached.

⁴³Manley, *Jamaica*, 152-157.

⁴⁴Manley, *Jamaica*, 159-160.

⁴⁵Stone, *Class*, 43-44.

According to Manley, seven hundred fifty people died in election violence. He argued that the violence resulted in increased migration and killed any hope of foreign investment that might improve the economy.⁴⁶

The result of the 1980 election was not a surprise. The JLP received fifty-eight percent of the vote, the PNP, forty-one percent. Manley concluded that the economy, the violence, and the JLP's portrayal of the PNP as a Communist organization all contributed to the loss.⁴⁷ After the election Manley criticized the JLP for orchestrating the political violence: "the JLP as official opposition had a good chance of winning the election without resorting to tactics which brought the country to the verge of civil war. Inflation was high, the economy was in trouble, crime was a headache: all the ingredients necessary for making the end of a two-term government were present."⁴⁸ The JLP blamed the violence on the high rate of unemployment, which ran as high as fifty per cent among the young slum dwellers most responsible for violent attacks.⁴⁹

Although Jamaica had a stable two-party political system, it was not able to translate that into political or economic stability. In the 1960s both the JLP and the PNP tried to improve conditions in Jamaica largely in cooperation with Britain and the United States. Jamaica continued to struggle; most Jamaicans did not benefit. In 1969 Michael Manley took control of the PNP when his father resigned. The younger Manley was determined to refocus the party's commitment to democratic socialism and to develop a new alliance among Third World nations that had suffered at the hands of colonial

⁴⁶Manley, *Jamaica*, 194-212; "Jamaica: Manley's Mess," 82; *Christian Science Monitor*, March 6, 1980, B22; Stone, *Class*, 150.

⁴⁷Manley, *Jamaica*, 207-208; *New York Times*, November 1, 1980, 3; *New York Times*, November 5, 1980, 30.

⁴⁸Manley, *Jamaica*, 219; "Voting Under the Gun," *Time* 116 (November 19, 1980): 38; "No to Chaos," *Time* 116 (November 24, 1980): 59.

⁴⁹*Christian Science Monitor*, November 7, 1980, 14.

powers. Manley forced foreign-owned companies that controlled the bauxite industry to negotiate new contracts that left more money in Jamaica. He also established new social programs to benefit Jamaicans, but the amount the government spent on the programs just increased the island's economic problems. Still, most islanders lived well below the poverty line. Despite strict gun control legislation and enforcement policies violence escalated.

West Indian writers watching developments on the islands began to question the competence and motives of the new generation of island leaders. They would be particularly critical of the fact that most islanders continued to struggle economically. Novels written by a new generation of West Indians authors between 1962 and 1980, like Austin Clarke, Ismail Khan, Early Lovelace, and Orlando Patterson, would refocus attention on the plight of the poorest islanders. V.S. Naipaul, Lovelace, and Neville Dawes would question the ability of island leaders educated and trained by the British to make improvements. Naipaul would take up the issue of Black Power and question the motives of its leaders on the islands as well.

Trinidad

In Trinidad the process of achieving independence focused attention on the existing division between blacks and East Indians that would become more problematic over the next few years. Blacks and East Indians had long distrusted each other.⁵⁰ Trinidad had the largest East Indian population of all the islands and so the most controversy. Under British rule, East Indians believed they were protected. With Eric Williams and the black-dominated People's National Movement (PNM) in charge, and the British about to leave, East Indian leaders became more concerned with their status in

⁵⁰See Chapter 1 for the origin of the division.

society. Dr. R. Capildeo, leader of the opposition, said that East Indians did not trust Williams and the PNM to protect their interests, although he admitted that Williams's plans for Trinidad were not much different from their own. In the end, the opposition supported Williams's move for complete independence from Britain.⁵¹

Trinidad and Tobago became independent on August 31, 1962. Eric Williams, the first prime minister, reminded citizens that they were no longer subject to British restrictions. He moved to help the poorest of the population by creating the Better Village Program, which provided health, library, and postal services to rural communities. Financial contributions from Texaco, a United States-based multinational oil company that moved its headquarters from Venezuela to Trinidad in 1962, and Tate and Lyle, a British agricultural business, funded the program which was designed to improve the rural standard of living.⁵²

The economy of the island suffered in the early 1960s. The petroleum industry, the core of Trinidad's economy, had an average growth rate of only 2.7 percent. The sugar industry was in decline. Unemployment jumped to over ten percent and the cost of living rose.⁵³ To counter the problem, Williams invited investment, outlined tax breaks for large corporations and promoted the growth of industrial parks. By the end of 1963,

⁵¹*Times* (London) May 26, 1962, 7; *New York Times*, May 27, 1962, 33; *Times* (London), May 29, 1962, 10; *Times* (London), May 31, 1962, 10; *Times* (London), June 5, 1962, 11; *Times* (London), June 9, 1962, 8.

⁵²Eric Williams, *Inward Hunger: The Education of a Prime Minister* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 308-309; *New York Times*, August 31, 1962, 1; Selwyn R. Cudjoe, ed., *Eric Williams Speaks: Essays on Colonialism and Independence* (Wellesley, MA: Calaloux Publications, 1993), 265; "New Nation," *Time* 80 (September 7, 1962): 29; "The Year After," *Time* 82 (December 1963): 49; Scott B. MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago: Democracy and Development in the Caribbean* (New York: Praeger, 1986), 148-149.

⁵³*Times* (London), January 30, 1962, 16; MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 149.

Trinidad could celebrate the opening of the one-hundredth factory to take advantage of the tax incentive.⁵⁴

The displeasure of the workers with the economic conditions was apparent in the number of strikes that took place. In 1962, there were seventy-five strikes, involving some 15,962 workers in the oil fields and in agriculture, manufacturing, construction, and transport. In 1963-1964, there were another ninety-two strikes, involving 25,896 workers in the same industries.⁵⁵

In March 1964, 15,000 sugar workers, most of whom were East Indian, went on strike, forcing five companies to close. Williams responded by declaring a state of emergency, banning meetings and demonstrations, and authorizing police searches for weapons and subversive literature. In March 1965 the legislature passed the Industrial Stabilization Act, which prohibited strikes in public services, placed restrictions on the right to strike, and banned lockouts that occurred without advance notice to the minister of labor. The bill had the desired effect. In 1965 there were only four strikes involving 7,160 workers. In 1966 there were none.⁵⁶

As the 1966 elections approached, Trinidad's economy continued to have serious problems. The public debt had risen to over \$50 million; unemployment stood at fourteen percent. In an attempt to alleviate the problems, the government opened a \$31.5 million electric power station in 1966. In addition, Canadian loans financed road

⁵⁴“The Year After,” 49; *Times* (London), August 10, 1962, 12; *New York Times*, September 1, 1963, 21; MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 149-150.

⁵⁵Williams, *Inward Hunger*, 311; *Times* (London), March 25, 1965, 11; MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 150.

⁵⁶Williams, *Inward Hunger*, 311-314; MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 150-151.

construction and an improved water supply. World Bank loans of \$8.5 million went to agricultural development and expansion. A vehicle assembly plant opened.⁵⁷

In 1966, the PNM campaigned on its record of achievement. According to Williams, “We never let the country forget what we had done.”⁵⁸ The party emphasized the money it had received for agricultural assistance and electrification. In the November elections, the PNM won a commanding twenty-four of thirty-six seats in the House, while the DLP, with largely East Indian support, won twelve. In the popular vote, the PNM received fifty-two percent, the DLP, thirty-four percent, with two smaller parties sharing the rest. Williams estimated that two-thirds of eligible voters cast ballots.⁵⁹

In 1967 the Williams government faced further economic problems when two oil companies announced that they would lay off about 3,000 workers by 1969, the government reduced its workforce in order to qualify for foreign loans, and the oil and sugar industries turned to increased automation at the expense of workers. Williams responded with new incentives for oil exploration and drilling and an \$11 million investment designed to bring three new tourist hotels to the island and to construct six new factories. The government also negotiated a \$6.6 million loan from the United States Export-Import Bank for new power-generating equipment, and a World Bank loan for highway construction.⁶⁰

A rise in the number of strikes, fourteen in 1967 and 1968, prompted Williams to initiate another economic plan in 1969. The goal of the new program was to diversify the

⁵⁷Williams, *Inward Hunger*, 334; *Times* (London), February 2, 1966, 20; MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 154.

⁵⁸Williams, *Inward Hunger*, 332.

⁵⁹Williams, *Inward Hunger*, 335-336; MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 154.

⁶⁰MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 155.

economy and create full employment. One program aimed to reduce the country's dependence on sugar by increasing the production of corn and soybeans.⁶¹

In 1969, the government also stepped in when the British Petroleum Company announced that it would cease operations in Trinidad. Rather than lose the 1500 jobs, the government formed the National Petroleum Company (NPC) and purchased the British company's entire operation. Unfortunately, the bureaucratically-operated government enterprise could never successfully compete with private oil companies that offered higher pay and attracted high caliber management and workers. Still, it continued to control the oil industry in the Williams government.⁶²

By 1970, Williams's programs had reduced unemployment to 12.5 percent, but 45,000 people were still without jobs. The unemployment problem combined with a new factor, the rise of the Black Power movement in the Caribbean, to increase the number of strikes to sixty-four in 1970.⁶³

The Black Power movement came to Trinidad in 1969. In Trinidad, as in the rest of the region, Black Power activists contended that although blacks held political power, whites still controlled the economy. They also argued that North American domination of politics, the economy, and the culture of the region had to end. In Trinidad, problems began in 1969 when the government, concerned about the Black Power movement, banned Stokely Carmichael, a Trinidadian-born Black Power figure in the United States, from entering the country. In the same year students in Trinidad and Tobago marched to protest the arrest and trial of Trinidadian students accused of destroying a computer

⁶¹MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 156.

⁶²Williams, *Inward Hunger*, 340; *Times* (London), May 19, 1969, 17; MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 156-157, 177.

⁶³MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 162.

center at the Sir George Williams University in Toronto. They claimed the Canadian students were suffering unfair discrimination.⁶⁴ Two student leaders in Trinidad, Geddes Granger and Dave Darbeau, organized the National Joint Action Congress (NJAC), which became a radical voice in support of black power. Besides students, the group also attracted unemployed and dissatisfied lower class black Trinidadians.⁶⁵

In 1970 student demonstrations escalated. Protesters marched during Carnival in February. In March a student-led Black Power march in Port of Spain attracted an estimated 10,000 demonstrators. In March some people with ties to the NJAC began a bombing campaign that targeted the United State vice-consul, banks, and businesses.⁶⁶

When Black Power leaders announced a general strike for April 21 that would include representatives from the sugar, oil, transport, and electrical unions, Williams took decisive action. On April 21, the day of the strike, he declared a state of emergency. The leaders of the black power movement were arrested. Although there were some riots and cases of arson in Port of Spain, the police were able to keep control of the situation and imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew. Without leadership the resistance crumbled.⁶⁷

With general elections scheduled for 1971, the PNM government tried to ease tensions by lifting the state of emergency on November 19, 1970. In a purely political move the party gave greater public exposure to black members, pushing lighter skinned

⁶⁴The students went on trial in Canada and were acquitted in 1970. See *Times* (London), March 12, 1970, 7.

⁶⁵*Times* (London), April 23, 1970, 9; MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 163; Palmer, *Eric Williams*, 287-290.

⁶⁶*Times* (London), March 13, 1970, 7; MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 163-164.

⁶⁷*Times* (London), April 22, 1970, 1; *Times* (London), April 23, 1970, 1; MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 164-166; Palmer, *Eric Williams*, 297.

party operatives into the background. Williams himself visited steelband yards and calypso parties, all in an attempt to appeal to the masses.⁶⁸

Williams called elections for May 1971. The DLP, still dominated by East Indians, was the major opposition. The NJAC ran candidates, too, but in the public's mind they were associated with violence, including guerrilla attacks, arson, looting, and bombing. In the month leading up to the elections, the PNM headquarters and the homes of the commander of the defense forces and a PNM minister were bombed. Despite the continuing economic problems on the island, the PNM captured all thirty-six seats in the House. This did not necessarily represent strong popular support for the government as only 33.1 percent of eligible voters participated.⁶⁹

In 1972 unemployment stood at fifteen percent, but did not include those who were underemployed or working less than thirty hours per week. Agricultural production continued to decline, the government increased international borrowing and had no answer to the employment problem. In 1973 there were eighty-four strikes in a variety of industries.⁷⁰

The government began to change its policies in 1972 when it announced higher taxes on foreign oil companies and the exclusion of foreign investors from some sectors of the economy, although the definition of a key sector remained ambiguous.⁷¹ The new program was aimed at achieving economic independence, raising the standard of living,

⁶⁸MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 168.

⁶⁹*Times* (London), May 25, 1971, 6; *Times* (London), May 27, 1971, 6; MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 172.

⁷⁰MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 172-173; Carl D. Parris, "Resource Ownership and the Prospects for Democracy: The Case of Trinidad and Tobago," in Henry and Stone, *The Newer Caribbean*, 317.

⁷¹The new taxes were still low by international standards. Trinidad and Tobago's new rate was U.S. \$.69 per barrel, compared to Kuwait's \$1.29, Libya's \$2.03, and Venezuela's \$1.56. MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 174.

and reducing unemployment. In 1972 alone several banks and insurance companies sold majority shares to local businesses, including the Royal Bank of Canada, which became the Royal Bank of Trinidad and Tobago.⁷²

Despite these achievements, in 1973 the unsettled international economy slowed progress. Inflation and rising interest rates in developed countries hurt Trinidad. In the wake of the Arab Oil Embargo, though, in November and December 1973 the world price of oil quadrupled. United States consumption of Arab oil declined from 1.2 million barrels a day to 18,000 barrels by February 1974. The United States became Trinidad's chief oil customer. As a result, the Trinidad government moved to control the industry. In 1974 it took over Shell's operations and by the end of 1975 it owned all of Texaco's gas stations. National Petroleum, the government company, became the lone domestic marketing company. The economic results were mixed, though. At the end of 1974 Trinidad had a positive balance of payments and a small deficit. In 1975, the GDP grew 3.2 per cent. Yet other economic problems persisted. Unemployment remained at fifteen percent, inflation increased from 14.8 percent to thirty-two percent in one year, and wages rose only ten percent. Inflation increased significantly because prices rose while oil revenue had not risen substantially as yet.⁷³

In February 1975 a new labor organization, the United Labour Front (ULF), unified black-dominated oil workers and East Indian-dominated sugar workers in a class-based opposition movement. It advocated populist alternatives to PNM conservatism. When the police used tear gas and clubs to break up a ULF march on Port of Spain, the group received national press coverage. By the time of the 1976 elections, the ULF was

⁷²MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 174; Parris, "Resource Ownership," 318.

⁷³MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 175-179.

known as the party of the trade unionists and leftist intellectuals from the University of the West Indies. It advocated national land reform, nationalization of foreign trade and multinational businesses, and increasing worker participation in management. The party promoted class alliances over racial ones. It failed to get the support of the East Indian middle class, though, which feared that the ULF would undermine the stability and viability of the economy.⁷⁴

In the general election of May 1976, the PNM denounced what it described as the socialist agenda of the ULF, vowing not to take land away from sugar workers. It also focused attention on economic gains derived from the oil boom. The PNM won twenty-four of thirty-six seats in the House, the ULF won ten, and two went to a third party, the Democratic Action Party (DAC), which took a more capitalist position than the other two. Almost fifty-six percent of the electorate participated. Although the PNM lost seats in the House, it managed to hold on to power largely because a two-year oil boom had begun to improve the economy. It also benefited from the failure of the ULP and DAC to unite in their attacks against the PNM government.⁷⁵

In the period 1976 to 1980, Trinidad experienced an economic miracle. Oil revenues increased significantly. Unemployment gradually declined to a low of 8.8 percent in 1980. Manufacturing, government, and construction all grew, providing jobs. The government provided more aid to its citizens by increasing old age pensions and food stamp coverage. By 1978, twenty-three companies were state-owned, in the oil, natural

⁷⁴*New York Times*, October 17, 1976, 21; MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 180-182.

⁷⁵*Times* (London), September 15, 1976, 7; *New York Times*, September 15, 1976, 12; *Economist*, September 18, 1976, 62; MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 182-183.

gas, aviation, agriculture, public utility and financial sectors, fourteen majority owned, and thirteen had minority interests.⁷⁶

One sector of the economy that continued to suffer was agriculture. By 1980 Trinidad was importing food that it could grow, as much as two-thirds of its needs. For example, sugar production declined 13.6 percent in one year, from 1976 to 1977 and continued to decline in subsequent years. The industry, along with cocoa and coffee, suffered from declining prices and difficulty retaining workers, who moved in large numbers to the construction industry, which offered higher wages and more social prestige than working the land.⁷⁷ Overall, though, Trinidad ended the 1970s with an improving financial position, thanks in large part to oil, and a stable social situation, although one still divided by racial issues.

Williams and the PNM brought political stability and oil brought some economic stability to Trinidad but problems persisted on both fronts. East Indians became concerned about their place in a society under the leadership of Williams, whose chief concern was for the black and mixed race populations. East Indians and blacks both protested the lack of achievement of the PNM government. In 1970, Black Power activists rose up against white economic control of Trinidad. By 1975 black oil workers and East Indian sugar workers had combined in the ULF to challenge PNM power. Williams and the PNM maintained control but minority parties gained some power in opposition. In 1976 the economic picture on the island began to improve, largely due to oil profits.

⁷⁶*Economist*, October 21, 1978, 101; MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 191-192.

⁷⁷*New York Times*, June 4, 1979, D2; *New York Times*, July 31, 1979, A2; MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 195.

Just as in Jamaica, political and economic conditions in Trinidad raised concerns among West Indian authors. Williams and the PNM dominated the political landscape while many blacks and most East Indians remained without a voice. Most workers continued to struggle to survive economically.

Barbados

When the Federation of the West Indies collapsed in 1962, and Jamaica and Trinidad declared their independence, the British supported a proposal for another federation of the eight remaining territories. The initiative continued for several years until the proposed merger collapsed largely over financial matters. In 1963, when the British refused to commit to an aid package for more than five years and urged island leaders to begin to attract funds from elsewhere, Errol Barrow, member of the Democratic Labour Party (DLP) and premier of Barbados, accused the British of attempting to pass off its economic responsibility to Barbados.⁷⁸

As a result of the failure to reach an agreement on an eight-island federation, Barrow proposed that Barbados seek its independence. Both the Barbados Labour Party (BLP) of Grantley Adams and the Barbados National Party (BNP), which represented middle-class mercantile and sugar cane estate interests, urged Barrow to continue to seek a federation, but they did not block attempts to gain independence. They believed that Barbados could become independent even as a member of the federation. Barrow, however, continued to push the British for quick approval of Barbados's independence.

⁷⁸*New York Times*, April 17, 1962, 10; Hillary Mc.D. Beckles, *A History of Barbados* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 198-199.

Barrow wanted the DLP to go into the 1966 elections as the party that had brought independence to the island. The British offered no resistance to Barrow's proposals.⁷⁹

In the 1966 pre-independence elections, the DLP won with fourteen seats and the BLP got ten. The BNP won two seats in what was their last contested election. Barbados gained its independence on November 30, 1966 with Errol Barrow becoming its first prime minister. In the early years of independence the island began to reap the benefits of programs initiated during the Federation years. Foreign investors had built hotels that began attracting large numbers of tourists. They managed most of the hotels and provided many tourist-related services, like travel arrangements. This new industry provided year-round employment for many islanders. By the 1970s tourism replaced sugar as the main source of foreign income.⁸⁰ Foreign investors also established some light manufacturing of electronic components and textile assembly plants. These also provided year-round employment opportunities. The government encouraged industrialization with tax holidays and duty-free incentives on raw materials.⁸¹

The post-independence Barbadian government wanted to design an educational program that could produce an educated voter, widen social opportunity, and train workers to participate in the new economic endeavors the island was pursuing. In 1962 it had begun to provide free secondary education. In 1963 the College of Arts and Sciences of the University of the West Indies had opened in Barbados. The island's increasing commitment to education began to produce better-educated workers, who provided

⁷⁹*Times* (London), February 7, 1966, 2; *Times* (London), July 4, 1966, 7; J.S.B. Dear, "The Birth of the Constitution," *The Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 40 (1992), 2-4.

⁸⁰*Times* (London), November 5, 1966, 6; *New York Times*, November 5, 1966, 22; *New York Times* August 21, 1966, 401; Beckles, *History of Barbados*, 202; DeLisle Worrell, "The Barbados Economy Since the 1920s," *The Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 42 (1994-1995), 79-81; Dear, "Constitution," 8.

⁸¹*New York Times*, November 25, 1965, 75; *New York Times*, August 21, 1966, 401; Worrell, "Barbados Economy," 80; Beckles, *History of Barbados*, 200.

professional, technical, and business services, but economic power did not shift to the black masses. The white elite continued to control the business world, although many of the teaching positions at the University of the West Indies went to West Indians.⁸²

Government investments were limited but did contribute to transportation, health, housing and roads on the island. The government financed a new seaport, upgraded the airport terminal and runways, and improved roads.⁸³ Nonetheless, the international economic crisis of the early 1970s threatened Barbados. Large increases in the price of fuels reduced Barbadian purchasing power and cut tourism, especially when transportation costs rose. Falling sugar prices contributed to the economic decline.⁸⁴

In 1970 Black Power protesters were poised to challenge white economic control of Barbados, but the Barrow government, which had benefited from white mercantile support, took steps to stop the protests. The all-black Barbadian Assembly passed the 1970 Public Order Act, which allowed police surveillance of known black radicals. It also voted to prevent Trinidad-born Black Power advocate Stokeley Carmichael from addressing public audiences. Despite these actions, the DLP won the 1971 general election easily; it received strong support from the white community.⁸⁵

Barbados managed to recover slightly when the international price of sugar tripled in 1974-1975. The government chose to save some of the additional tax income so it could potentially offset a future economic crisis. It also chose not to create public service

⁸²*New York Times*, August 21, 1966, 401; Worrell, "Barbados Economy," 80; Ralph Jemmott and Dan Carter, "Barbadian Educational Development, 1933-1993: An Interpretive Analysis II," *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 42 (1994-1995), 113-115; Leonard L. Shorey and Gerald St. C. Rose, "Education and Development," in Trevor Carmichael, ed., *Barbados: Thirty Years of Independence* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle, 1996), 137.

⁸³*Times* (London), November 14, 1968, 2; *New York Times*, August 21, 1969, 401; Worrell, "Barbados Economy," 81.

⁸⁴Worrell, "Barbados Economy," 83; Evelyn Greaves, "Labour in Independence," in Carmichael, ed., *Barbados*, 178.

⁸⁵*Times* (London), September 7, 1970, 2; Beckles, *History of Barbados*, 204.

jobs. This forced Barbadians to curtail their own spending. However, when sugar prices fell in 1975, the Barbados budget deficit was manageable, unlike the experience of Jamaica, where job creation and nationalization programs left the country with large deficits. In Jamaica, financing those deficits led to inflation, shortages of essential goods, currency devaluation, and the loss of real income.⁸⁶

In the 1976 elections, the DLP campaigned on their record of achievement, arguing that the government had modernized the island. The BLP exploited the DLP's decision not to create jobs. Even with a stable economy some workers, mostly unemployed, shifted their allegiance. The BLP regained power, capturing seventeen of twenty-four seats in the House; the DLP won the other seven. Tom Adams, son of former Prime Minister Grantley Adams who had retired after the previous elections, became prime minister. By the late 1970s Barbados experience a measure of recovery. Tourism increased, providing jobs and money that was reinvested in tourism and manufacturing. Interestingly, the oil boom in Trinidad benefited Barbadian manufacturers because they could underprice their Trinidadian rivals.⁸⁷

By the end of the 1970s, the Barbadian economy had rebounded. Unemployment had fallen to about ten percent. Inflation was high because of import costs, but tourism, manufacturing, and agriculture all earned foreign exchange. The worst poverty was gone. The social situation was stable.⁸⁸

Barbados was one of the more stable of the former British colonies. Barrow and the DLP brought in foreign investment that increased tourism, developed manufacturing opportunities, and increased access to education. The government invested in social and

⁸⁶Worrell, "Barbados Economy," 83.

⁸⁷*Times* (London), September 4, 1976, 5; Worrell, "Barbados Economy," 83-84.

⁸⁸Worrell, "Barbados Economy," 84.

development programs, but it also put money aside to deal with future economic crises. Because of that decision, Barbados was able to cope with the economic recession of the 1970s far better than Jamaica. Barbados never tried to end white ownership of local businesses; it acted quickly to stop the arrival of the Black Power movement. By the mid-1970s the failure of the DLP to create jobs allowed the BLP a chance to regain political power; under the new leadership of Tom Adams, Barbados continued to progress economically and cope with economic setbacks.

Barbados's success was uncharacteristic of the experiences of most West Indian islands after independence. Although white ownership could have been a divisive issue, economic stability seemed to blunt any potential problems. Barbados's experience represented an example of successful decolonization in the West Indies, although West Indian novelists would be critical of white ownership in the newly free islands. Sam Selvon and Clarke would both explore the problems of West Indians working on white-owned sugar plantations.

Conclusion

Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Barbados all achieved their independence in the 1960s. Each new country struggled to find solutions to the economic problems that plagued their citizens. Each new leader thought that he had the answers that the British had never found. Each was wrong. Economic and political problems would continue and in most cases get worse.

Michael Manley's attempts to challenge the former colonial powers through his Third World movement failed. Oil revenues that provided a measure of economic security to Trinidad could not prevent racial problems that Williams had to deal with

throughout his tenure in office. Although Barbados was politically and economically more stable than most of the other islands, unemployment was still a problem for both Barrow and Adams. West Indian novelists who had begun their careers criticizing the British for all the ills of their former colonies, would now turn their attention to the new leaders.

CHAPTER VIII
WEST INDIANS AT HOME AND ABROAD
1960-1978

“It Hurts to See You Slowly Going White”¹

In 1970, St. Lucian poet Derek Walcott wrote, “It is almost death to the spirit to try to survive as an artist under colonial conditions which haven’t really changed with our independent governments.”² V. S. Naipaul expressed a similar view a year later when he said that in Trinidad “there was intellectual isolation, added to the commercial and practical disadvantage of not having an audience that will buy your books or support you as a writer . . . the writer has no loving cultural world about him, and has to make his way into another world, one which is entirely alien to him.”³ Even in the 1970s it was clear that the work of most West Indian authors was not reaching the majority of citizens at home. The level of education and literacy on the islands and the tendency of the authors to exile themselves separated the novelists from the people back home. Of the forty-five novels published in just one short span of this period, between 1960 and 1964, forty-three were published in England, one in the United States, and one in Jamaica.⁴

¹Mervyn Morris, “To an Expatriate Friend,” in John Figueroa, ed., *An Anthology of African and Caribbean Writing in English* (London: Heinemann, 1982), 248.

²Derek Walcott, *The Gulf* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970), 5.

³Adrian Rowe-Evans, “V.S. Naipaul: A *Transition* Interview,” in Feroza Jussawalla, ed., *Conversations with V.S. Naipaul* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 25.

⁴Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and Its Background* (London: Heinemann, 1983), 63.

In this period some of the original group of West Indian authors continued to write, while some new authors began to explore both old and new issues. Sam Selvon, for instance, pursued his exploration of the West Indian experience in London and the East Indian experience at home. George Lamming also wrote in a vein similar to his early work, tackling the problem of breaking away from colonial influence. In addition, writers became concerned about the experiences of émigrés who could not adjust to changes in their home societies when they returned to islands run by locally elected leaders. Selvon addressed this topic, as did two new writers, Austin Clarke and Orlando Patterson. V.S. Naipaul branched out to treat a number of different subjects; one of his novels launched an attack on the new generation of local leaders who were coming to power in the region. Naipaul was also the only author to devote a novel to the Black Power movement and its leadership. Neville Dawes, another new novelist, explored the problems of West Indians who returned home with political ambitions. Finally, Lamming and Naipaul delved back into history to consider how the islands arrived at the place they occupied in the late twentieth century. More of these works received critical attention than the novels discussed in previous chapters. In addition, some of these critiques were by local islanders and printed in island publications. Therefore, politicians and middle-class urban residents would have been familiar with the output of the novelists and their themes, although they achieved little to change the economic and social conditions the novelists described. This chapter will explore how these writers used their novels to call attention to the political and economic problems confronting West Indians between 1960 and 1978. Although most of these novels were written

abroad, they increasingly focused attention on the post-independence problems of the islands.

West Indians in London

Selvon and Lamming remained interested in the experiences of West Indians living in London. Both authors pointed out that West Indians saw Britain as a place to succeed even years after it was clear that life there was a struggle for emigres.

The novel *Moses Ascending* (1975) continues Selvon's look into the life of Moses, an émigré to London, whom he first introduced in *The Lonely Londoners*.⁵ This time the author focuses on the fact that immigrants continue to believe that European culture is superior to any other in London, including black, Asian, and Caribbean. In this novel Moses has moved out of his basement apartment to a new one on the top floor of the rundown house he now owns. He is content with a new sense of economic power and time for leisure. He hires Bob, a white man, to look after the tenants while he writes his memoirs.

In the course of the novel Moses has to deal with Black Panther militants who use his basement as a headquarters. The novel does not portray the Black Power movement in a positive light. BP, an American leader on a visit, begins a meeting with a call to prayer, "but suddenly he was screaming out to kill all the whites and burn down the City of London, and as far as the pigs were concerned, hang one up in the doorway of every police station."⁶ Although Moses does not sympathize with the Black Power views, he admits to white racism in London against any minority; "I know that English people so stupid that the whole lot of Orientals and Blacks is the same kettle of fish as far as they

⁵Sam Selvon, *Moses Ascending* (London: Heinemann, [1975] 1984). For details of *The Lonely Londoners*, see Chapter 6.

⁶Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 93.

are concerned.”⁷ The police lock him up when he is just a spectator at a demonstration. They also arrest Galahad, Moses’s friend and an ardent supporter of Black Power, who also appeared in *The Lonely Londoners* as a new arrival in the city. The police arrest Brenda, who is Galahad’s friend, and BP. When asked why, Bob, who is white, replies, “Much against my will, I gravely suspect it is only because they are black.”⁸

Moses is also involved in the lives of some Asian inhabitants of London as well. Faizull, a Pakistani resident of Moses’s apartment building, offers shelter to illegal Indian immigrants who slaughter sheep in the backyard. Moses describes them thus:

It was a motley trio Faizull sheperd into the house. I have seen bewitched, bothered and bewildered adventurers land in Waterloo from the Caribbean with all their incongruous paraphernalia and myriad expressions of amazement and shock, but this Asian threesome beat them hands down.⁹

Although Moses sees the Pakistanis and Indians as inferior to him, Faizull sees them as having the same problems. He says, “It is always good to have a white man around, it allays suspicion.”¹⁰

Moses has decided to use his leisure to write a book, because he believes it is the proper thing for a man of property in London to do. When his old friend Galahad questions Moses’s motive in writing his book, it leads to an interesting exchange. Moses begins,

“I am not an ignoramous like you,” I say, beginning to lose my cool.
“You think writing a book is like kissing hand? You should leave that to people like Lamming and Salkey.”
“Who?”
Galahad burst out laughing. Derisively, too.

⁷Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 51.

⁸Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 96.

⁹Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 66.

¹⁰Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 74.

“You never heard of them?”
“I know of Accles and Pollock, but not Lamming and Salkey.”
“You see what I mean? Man Moses, you still living in the Dark Ages! You don’t even know that we have created a Black Literature, that it have writers who write some powerful books what making the white world realize our existence and our struggle.”¹¹

Selvon implies that even Moses, who has spent his life in London helping his fellow islanders adjust, is out of touch with the progress some blacks from the Caribbean have made. By the end of the novel Moses is back living in the basement of his own house because Bob discovers him having an affair with his wife. They move up to the top floor.

In *Moses Ascending*, Selvon made the point that no matter how long West Indians stayed in London they never seemed to fit into British society but still continued to admire the British. Moses was the one who helped others adjust, yet he struggled to become a home owner and write his memoirs; both represented goals associated with Europeans rather than West Indians. Selvon showed that racism continued against not only blacks but Asians and mixed race West Indians as well. Moses, though, believed he was superior to the Indians who rented from him, a West Indian attitude of blacks toward East Indians that Selvon introduced us to in *A Brighter Sun*.¹² When Moses did not know the names of West Indian authors, Selvon was relying on his own experience; the majority of West Indian poor urban slum dwellers, rural agricultural workers, and some émigrés living in London could not have identified Selvon. The poor islanders were uneducated and wrapped up in earning a living to survive; the émigrés most often left the islands behind for good.

¹¹Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 42-43. The reference is to George Lamming and Andrew Salkey, West Indian novelists.

¹²See Chapter 5 for details of *A Brighter Sun*.

In a contemporary review, Valentine Cunningham, a professor of literature at Oxford, asked “Why is not Sam Selvon better known to white readers? . . . beneath the self-deprecating brightness of the novel’s amiable surface lie whole strata of soreness.”¹³

Helene Buzelin, a professor of post-colonial theory at the University of Montreal, said,

The whole book is a farce in which not only Moses’ aspirations, but the styles themselves – or rather the prestige attached to them – are parodied. . . . Moses . . . remains a Trinidadian emigrant who has great literary ambitions and a tremendous linguistic appetite and creativity, but who never quite forgets that he belongs to the working class.¹⁴

Lamming also returned to study the lives of West Indian exiles in London in *Water with Berries* (1971).¹⁵ The story is about three impoverished West Indian artists living in London who have difficulty integrating into British society. Each of them has to face some fear from their past during the two week period the novel covers. Teeton, the chief protagonist, is a painter who has trouble selling his art. As the novel opens he is trying to tell his landlady, the Old Dowager, that he is moving out of her house. In fact, he has known this for some time but his insecurity has prevented him from telling her; instead he tries to sneak out. When he learns that his wife Randa has committed suicide in San Cristobal, he is overcome with grief. She became the wife of the American ambassador to secure Teeton’s release from prison after an uprising. When he was set free, Teeton abandoned her because he could not forgive her the infidelity that freed him. He reacts to the news of her death by beating the Old Dowager, who is a symbol of the

¹³Valentine Cunningham, “Review of *Moses Ascending*,” *Times Literary Supplement* (August 29, 1975): 961.

¹⁴Helene Buzelin, “Creolizing Narratives across Languages: Selvon and Chamoiseau,” *Canadian Literature* 175 (Winter 2002): 79.

¹⁵George Lamming, *Water with Berries* (London: Longman Caribbean, 1971).

culture that drew him away from the islands and his wife to what he thought was a better opportunity in Britain.

Roger, a musician of East Indian descent, denounces his pregnant European wife Nicole because his fear of racial mixing takes control of his life, a fear that Lamming says stems from his horror of the creolized society of the West Indies of his childhood. When Roger tells his friends that he believes Nicole had an affair, Derek, an actor with a strong Christian background, is compelled to reveal Roger's accusations of infidelity to Nicole. She commits suicide. Roger is devastated by what he has done; he sets fire to their home to try to erase any trace of his wife. Derek reacts to her death by beating another actor on stage during a play in which he is performing. In the end, Teeton, Roger, and Derek all turn to these violent acts that they believe will lead to freedom and escape from the false safety London has provided.

In this novel Lamming continued his attack against the effects of being raised in a colonial society. Teeton, Roger, and Derek all moved to London to achieve success. When they failed, they blamed the British and acted out in rage against British citizens and sometimes their own people, like Nicole. Lamming believed that the effects of colonialism lingered long after the system ended. In an interview in 1979 he said, "The Old Dowager does represent that last, fading, but very potent voice of empire . . . It's an empire that is in decline, but its psychological force is still very operative on all who come within its orbit . . . That's why [Teeton] has to kill her."¹⁶

An anonymous review published in the *Times Literary Supplement* said, "*Water with Berries* does not entirely convince either as a study of the pains of exile, or as an

¹⁶Daryl Cumber Dance, ed., *New World Adams: Conversations with Contemporary West Indian Writers* (Leeds, Yorkshire: Peepal Tree Books, [1984] 1992), 138.

allegory of colonialism. The book flounders between realism and fantasy.”¹⁷ British author Paul Theroux believed that the three men were “engaged in Britain in a kind of negligent rebellion. They are plagued by workless days, several unnamed terrors; they are not uncomfortable in England, but they are acutely dependent upon it.”¹⁸ Lamming’s 1979 interview showed that he would have agreed with Theroux’s description of the West Indians’ attitude toward Britain.

Selvon and Lamming were the first West Indians to write about the lives of émigrés; their own experiences sustained their interest. In the 1960s, West Indians were continuing to try to succeed in London as artists, writers, and actors, careers which provided very limited opportunities at home. Often their efforts were frustrated. Britons still perceived them as outsiders and they perceived themselves as outsiders, as these novels illustrated.

West Indians Come Home

In the 1960s, Selvon and Naipaul would deal with the problems associated with returning home after being educated abroad, a topic Lamming had explored in the previous decade in *Season of Adventure*.¹⁹ Three new authors, Austin Clarke, Orlando Patterson, and Neville Dawes would address the same issue.

In 1963 Selvon published *I Hear Thunder*, which explores the problems encountered by West Indians who go abroad to get an education and return home to try to re-integrate into society.²⁰ Mark, an islander who earned a medical degree in England, returns home with a white wife, Joyce. Both his education and his choice of a spouse

¹⁷“Storm-tossed,” *Times Literary Supplement* (February 11, 1972): 145.

¹⁸Paul Theroux, “Versions of Exile,” *Encounter* 38 (May 1972): 69.

¹⁹See Chapter 5 for details of the novel.

²⁰Sam Selvon, *I Hear Thunder* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1963).

separate him from the people he knew as a child. Mark left the island to join the Royal Air Force during World War II. After the war, he studied medicine and chose to return home with his new wife to launch his practice. From the beginning, his wife's presence flusters local women; they do not know quite how to treat her. Mark's mother, a washer-woman, calls her daughter-in-law "Madam" and refuses to leave her village home to move into her son's large new house in the city.

Mark's education also separates him from his childhood friends. He is determined to succeed as a doctor providing medical care to islanders in need. Adrian is an East Indian and Mark's longtime friend, who received a local education at Queen's Royal College that allows him to get a good job in the city of San Fernando. He believes his "inevitable destiny [is] to go to work, to parties, to fetes, to play Carnival . . . to buy a car . . . marry and have a large family, and send the children abroad to study."²¹ He works as a traveling representative for a canning company and does not quite know what to do to give his life a purpose. Selvon contrasts both men with the native, Ramdeen, who never attends school and is awestruck by anyone with an education. Yet, neither Mark nor Adrian view themselves as superior to Ramdeen.

Selvon's novel provided a portrait of a newly independent Caribbean island. Well-educated West Indians came home to lead people with whom they had lost touch. Even Mark's mother was in awe of her daughter-in-law. She was more comfortable living in her village than in her son's better home in the city. Adrian was educated on the island. Although he was able to get good jobs, he continued to see life from a Caribbean perspective, giving more importance to parties and Carnival than to achieving something in life. Mark and Adrian could renew their friendship on a limited basis because they had

²¹Selvon, *I Hear Thunder*, 10.

some education in common. Ramdeen, who never received an education, could not relate to either of them anymore, even though they do not look down on him. Selvon's novel illustrated a problem that West Indian political leaders confronted every day: how to reach people, and help people, who did not want to abandon their old customs. In a 1980 interview Selvon described Mark as "a man who would like to keep his friend, who would like to remain the kind of black Trinidadian who really loved Trinidad, who loved Carnival, who loved flying kites, and who finds himself forced to move into the white country club set that he obviously doesn't really like."²²

In a contemporary review of the novel, Derek Walcott, the St. Lucian poet, said of the novel "the investigation is sincere, but the report is predictable."²³ British literary critic Christopher Wordsworth, a reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement*, said that Selvon "has a sense of pattern: one can almost smell his streets and jungles . . . But for cutting through to the complexities of thinking people he wields a rather blunt machete."²⁴ Despite its literary shortcomings, though, Selvon presented an accurate portrait of life on the West Indian island.

Austin Clarke was the first of a new generation of West Indian authors to investigate the problems of returning émigrés. Clarke was born in Barbados in 1964 and educated at Combermere and Harrison College, the most prestigious schools in Barbados. He taught for three years on the island before moving to Canada in 1955 to study

²²Dance, ed., *New World Adams*, 238.

²³Derek Walcott, "The Action Is Panicky," *Sunday Gleaner*, May 5, 1963, 4.

²⁴Christopher Wordsworth, "Review of *I Hear Thunder*," *Times Literary Supplement* (April 26, 1963): 292.

economics at the University of Toronto. In 1975 he began a one-year term as cultural officer and advisor to the prime ministers of Barbados.²⁵

In *The Prime Minister* (1977), a novel based on his own experiences, Clarke writes about a native who returns to his island.²⁶ John Moore goes back to Barbados to accept a high-level government job after twenty years living in Canada writing poetry. He finds that although it is easy to return physically, he cannot return mentally or emotionally. He has more trouble getting through immigration than the tourists who are welcomed and eased through the process. The immigration officer treats him as a foreigner, even though he carries a local passport. “His country had become independent while he had been away from it; and he wanted to boast in celebration of its independence by carrying his country’s passport.”²⁷

He knows very quickly that he is “not really at home.”²⁸ On his first evening in Barbados he attends a party and discovers that he has trouble understanding the local dialect. He notices something else as well – the detachment of these people from the realities of everyday life. “You could not tell, standing here, in this cool tropical late afternoon, that thirty percent of the population was unemployed; there was no reminder of the high cost of living which everybody was talking about, and of the high cost of food and imported scotch which everybody was drinking.”²⁹

²⁵Daryl Cumber Dance, “Austin Clarke,” in Daryl Cumber Dance, ed., *Fifty Caribbean Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 115-116; Dance, ed., *New World Adams*, 46-57. In addition to the novels contained in this study, Clarke also wrote three novels about the experiences of Barbadian immigrants in Canada: *The Meeting Point* (1967), *Storm of Fortune* (1973), and *The Bigger Light* (1975). They deal with the efforts of Barbadian immigrants to fit into an alien society and at the same time preserve their distinctiveness. *When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks* (1971) is a collection of short stories.

²⁶Austin Clarke, *The Prime Minister* (Ontario: General Publishing, 1977).

²⁷Clarke, *Prime Minister*, 14.

²⁸Clarke, *Prime Minister*, 16.

²⁹Clarke, *Prime Minister*, 21.

Moore keeps thinking about *Paradise Lost* – to him the paradise that is lost is Barbados. It is now the land of tourists, but a cab driver tells him, “I been driving tourists in this place for donkey years, and in my simple way o’ looking at things and tourists I was forced to see that all the mony they bring-in in here, don’t even reach down to people like me.”³⁰ The locals even prostitute themselves to the hoards of tourists who overrun Barbados. “Many ministers owned apartment-hotels which they rented only to tourists, in foreign currency; and some of them went into business with private citizens who trafficked in the tourist women. A lot of money was made in this business.”³¹ The government protects the tourists at any cost.

The government is corrupt and inept in other ways as well. Moore’s secretary cannot spell, but her employment file is full of praise for her abilities. The chief minister tells him who he can and cannot hire. When a calypso song appears to mock the country’s new national anthem by using the same beginning notes, the government bans it, a tactic typical of the British who feared calypso songs of protest would lead to lower-class revolt. Although no calypso band plays it, the people in the streets sing the song constantly. When a bomb explodes in Moore’s office while he is out, the government blames it on the opposition party and arrests its leader even though there is no proof he was behind the attack. The government declares a state of emergency and postpones scheduled elections until peace returns. Ultimately, Moore has to flee the island to save his life.

Clarke’s protagonist was a poet who returned to Barbados after a twenty-year absence. He found that he had lost touch with his people. In Clarke’s book Moore did

³⁰Clarke, *Prime Minister*, 42.

³¹Clarke, *Prime Minister*, 79.

not have to reconnect with the local people, a process most authors detailed, but with the new leaders of society. He found that they were out of touch with the problems of their own society. They were unaware of, or unconcerned with, the plight of the majority of the people; unemployment and the high cost of living were of no great concern to them. The local politicians cared more about the tourist industry because they had investments in the business. Tourist dollars did not extend down to the lower classes as the cab driver reported.

Clarke illustrated other forms of government corruption as well. Workers got jobs because they were loyal to the ruling party, like Moore's secretary. The government tried to suppress a calypso song that was critical of the ruling party, a tactic Lamming detailed in connection with steel bands in *Season of Adventure*.³² When there was violence against the government, the prime minister blamed it on the opposition and declared a state of emergency, a tactic used more than once in Jamaica by Michael Manley and in Trinidad by Eric Williams.³³

In an interview in 1979, Clarke acknowledged that the novel was based on his experiences when he returned to Barbados in 1975. He said that he found an incompetent government and a violent political situation in which there were bomb threats against his office. He added that he believed the government and the tourists had destroyed Barbados. He argued that the émigré himself was part of the problem, because natives believed that the returning citizen was an expatriate and a foreigner who had no right to return.³⁴

³²*Season of Adventure* appears in Chapter 6.

³³See Chapter 7 for details of Jamaica under the Manley government and Trinidad under the Williams government.

³⁴Dance, ed., *New World Adams*, 73-74. I found no contemporary reviews of this novel.

Another new author, Orlando Patterson, dealt with the problems of a West Indian intellectual who tried to return home. Patterson was born near the Frome sugar plantation, site of one of the 1938 riots, in Westmoreland, Jamaica, in 1940. He attended Kingston College and then the University of the West Indies (UWI), making him one of the few West Indian authors who chose to stay home to get his first degree. He was at UWI in the four years leading up to Jamaica's independence in 1962. In 1963 he moved into a doctoral program at the London School of Economics on a Commonwealth scholarship; he earned his Ph. D. in 1965. While in London, Patterson belonged to the Marxist intellectual group associated with the *New Left Review*. When he returned to Jamaica in 1967, he was no longer an activist. He taught sociology at UWI until he accepted a position in the United States at Harvard University. When Michael Manley was elected in 1972, Patterson became an active member of the Technical Advisory Committee to the prime minister.³⁵

In *An Absence of Ruins* (1967) Patterson explores the mental dilemmas of an alienated West Indian intellectual.³⁶ The hero is Alexander Blackman, a young sociologist who has returned to his native Jamaica to teach at the University of the West Indies after studying at Oxford. He feels confined by the island. He is disillusioned with the study of politics, literature, and sociology, none of which can help him understand himself.

One way Blackman tries to discover the significance of his life is by exploring the nature of his relationship with his wife Pauline. She is a local girl whom he married on

³⁵Bridget Jones, "Orlando Patterson," in Dance, ed., *Fifty Caribbean Writers*, 368-369; Dance, *New World Adams*, 194-203. In addition to the novels used in this study, Patterson also wrote a number of non-fiction works including *The Sociology of Slavery* (1969), *Black in White America: Historical Perspectives* (1975), and *Slavery and Social Death* (1983).

³⁶Orlando Patterson, *An Absence of Ruins* (London: Hutchinson, 1967).

his return to the island. Now he believes he never loved her. He wants to leave her but on the small island he cannot avoid her. It makes it hard for him to break away completely.

At the same time, Blackman studies Jamaican society. He cannot relate to the political ideals of his radical socialist friends, who are critical of local political leaders. In one scene they are examining the government's latest five-year plan. Lloyd, whom Patterson describes as "a rabid socialist," says

Just take a look at that agreement which the government reached with the bauxite companies over royalties. Or just glance at the whole plan. No imagination. No imagination at all. A few more jobs for the boys. A few more housing estates for the civil servants. A few more palliatives for the slum districts and that's all. That's all. It's a disgrace. It's a scandal.³⁷

Blackman respects Lloyd's views, but believes it is not up to him to change society; that is the job of the government. In fact, Patterson says, Blackman can never come to terms with the local society or with his role in it.

Blackman describes another type of Jamaican he cannot tolerate. John Fitzmaurice, a physicist at the university, "was what one could glibly dismiss as a black Englishman. His manners, his speech, his gestures, even, at times, his dress, appeared completely English. This . . . was . . . not so much irritating as sad and pathetic."³⁸ The description was similar to Selvon's portrait of a black Englishman in *The Lonely Londoners*.³⁹ They both describe black men who believe that they have succeeded in life if they are like the British who ruled the islands for so long.

³⁷Patterson, *An Absence of Ruins*, 45.

³⁸Patterson, *An Absence of Ruins*, 59-60.

³⁹See Chapter 6.

Blackman also has a strained relationship with his mother. She sacrificed everything to give him an education, but he is abandoning his opportunities at the university. When he fakes his own suicide because he believes no one will care and it will free him of his responsibilities in life, his mother has a heart attack and dies.

Blackman's wife, Pauline, discovers that she is relieved when she thinks he is dead; she finds that she does not need him, that she can survive without him.

Blackman cannot return to the folk culture of his youth. He cannot find alibis in history for his failure to understand his identity. After his mother's funeral, he escapes from Jamaica and returns to London. When an Englishman asks him who he is, Blackman responds

I come from nowhere worth mentioning. I have no past, except the haunting recollection of each passing moment which comes to me always as something having lost. My ancestors, if they existed, left no record of themselves; my mother who also fathered me, I sacrificed to a futile cause many shameful years ago. If I appear to be like you, please understand that it is out of no vain wish to be identified with you, but out of the simple desire not to draw attention to myself. I cannot say whether I am civilized or savage, standing as I do outside of race, outside of culture, outside of history, outside of any value that could make your question meaningful. I am busy going nowhere, but I must keep up the appearance of going in order to forget that I am not.⁴⁰

Patterson's story of a returning intellectual focused attention on another aspect of the émigré experience – defining exactly who you were as a West Indian. Lamming and Selvon had studied this dilemma among émigrés in London.⁴¹ Now Patterson looked at the issue from the perspective of an émigré who returned. When he arrived home he discovered that all the knowledge he had acquired did not help him understand who he

⁴⁰Patterson, *An Absence of Ruins*, 160.

⁴¹See Chapter 6.

was and where he fit in back home. One way he tried to discover himself was by analyzing his relationship with the Jamaican society in which he was living. His friend Lloyd, whom Patterson described as a radical, was critical of a government bauxite deal, which was reminiscent of Michael Manley's Jamaican deal with bauxite companies, because it would not help the people. Patterson also described a West Indian who adopted English manners; this was not uncommon among West Indians who were trying to identify themselves with the British. Blackman never discovered an identity that satisfied him. He did not fit in in Jamaica or in London. This was a common reaction among West Indians who moved abroad or tried to succeed at home, as most of these authors have testified.

In a contemporary review, Arthur Drayton, a professor of African studies, said that the greatest significance of Patterson's novel lay in the insights it provided into what he described as the Jamaican, and West Indian, predicament.⁴² Mervyn Morris, a West Indian poet and critic, wrote an unfavorable review, claiming that the turnabout in part three, when Blackman decided to return to London, was unconvincing.⁴³ Edward Brathwaite, another West Indian poet and critic, called it a novel of frustration and separation.⁴⁴

Naipaul approached the topic of the retuning émigré from the perspective of a politician and a Black Power leader in two separate novels. In *The Mimic Men* (1967), Ralph Kripal Singh, the main character, represents a generation that assumes power at

⁴²Arthur Drayton, "Awkward Questions for Jamaicans," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 7 (July 1969): 125.

⁴³Mervyn Morris, "Review of *An Absence of Ruins*," *Public Opinion* (May 19, 1967): 5.

⁴⁴Edward Brathwaite, "West Indian Prose Fiction in the Sixties: A Survey," *Critical Survey* 3 (Winter 1967), 169-174.

independence.⁴⁵ Naipaul tells the story in the form of memories recounted by Singh of his childhood, his life as a student in London, his return to the island of Isabella, his political career, and his exile in England. Singh lacks purpose, energy, and creativity. He represents nationalist politics intent on destroying the old colonial order, but the islands have nothing with which to build a new society, so chaos results. Real power lies elsewhere because the island remains dependent on economic aid and foreign investments to bring about social change. As a politician Singh admires England, but he realizes that England can no longer help him. He must face an island divided by racial tension. He briefly wonders what he, an Indian, is doing on a slave island.

The novel begins with Singh in the early years of retirement, looking back on his career.

My career is by no means unusual. It falls into the pattern. The career of the colonial politician is short and ends brutally. We lack order. Above all, we lack power, and we do not understand that we lack power. We mistake words and the acclamation of words for power; as soon as our bluff is called we are lost. . . . Our transitional or makeshift societies do not cushion us. . . . For those we lose, and nearly everyone in the end loses, there is only one course: flight. Flight to the greater disorder, the final emptiness: London and the home countries.⁴⁶

Singh goes to London to escape his native island, Isabella. He believes London is the real world; he finds that it is just a larger Isabella with its own insecurity. At first he lives in a boarding house with other immigrants, whom he describes as “two-dimensional, offering simple versions of themselves.”⁴⁷ He moves into the home of a middle-class family, but there he finds prejudice. The London he learned about in the schoolroom,

⁴⁵V.S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1967).

⁴⁶Naipaul, *The Mimic Men*, 10-11.

⁴⁷Naipaul, *The Mimic Men*, 17-18.

where he believed he belonged and would be accepted because he was British, is nowhere to be found. At the point of his deepest despair, he meets Sandra, the white woman who will become his wife.

Singh and Sandra return to Isabella from London with no clear plans. They join the local social set of young professionals who studied abroad and returned home with foreign wives. Singh becomes rich through real estate speculation then begins to drift into the political independence movement. There are two schools of political thought on the island. One group, usually made up of older islanders, believes that because colonial society was shaped by foreign traditions and values, the island must retain them. The younger generation believes that all traditions and values that remind the islanders of their colonial bondage must be destroyed. Singh's old school pal, Browne, adopts the second view and asks Singh to join his movement. When Browne gets elected, though, he finds he needs economic help from England to succeed.

Singh is never at home in Isabella. Appeals to race and color begin to dominate politics. Singh realizes that it was the attainment of power that drives him and his allies. Once they have it, they have no cause left. They have no real power either. They deal with one crisis after another.

But on power and the consolidation of passing power we wasted our energies, until the bigger truth came: that in a society like ours, fragmented, inorganic, no link between man and the landscape, a society not held together by common interests, there was no true internal source of power . . . such was the controlled chaos we had, with such enthusiasm, brought upon ourselves.⁴⁸

When Singh takes the wrong side in a labor dispute, what popularity he has crumbles. Then Sandra leaves him. He takes advantage of a mission to England to

⁴⁸Naipaul, *The Mimic Men*, 246.

separate himself from the new government and the country. Singh sees this as another new beginning for himself. His departure is a loss for the island; a man who might have improved life there has given up the attempt.

Although Naipaul was writing about an East Indian, the focus of the novel was alienation and failed political leadership. Singh was a displaced West Indian who came home from London but could not make a political difference. Naipaul pointed out that racial tension was present on the island; Singh himself wondered what he was doing on a slave island. Economically the island was dependent on foreign investment. By 1967, when Naipaul wrote this novel, a new generation of islanders was challenging those who had brought the island to independence; their challenge was based largely on opposition to the continuing economic dependence on foreign aid. When the new generation came to power, though, they too found themselves dependent on foreign investment. As Naipaul described it, the island's leaders dealt with one crisis after another, with no hope of permanent change in the near future.

Karl Miller, professor of English at the University of Texas, said of the novel, "those who are not acquainted with Trinidad will be reluctant to judge Naipaul's successive pictures of graft and corruption," but he pointed out that the book was written after Naipaul's tour of the Caribbean for *The Middle Passage*.⁴⁹ He went on to say that *The Mimic Men* focused on the legacies of colonialism and how to deal with general issues, rather than presenting the specific problems the new government had to solve.⁵⁰ Peter Nazareth, professor of English and African-American World Studies at the University of Iowa, argued that in the novel Naipaul analyzed and evaluated situations,

⁴⁹Karl Miller, "V.S. Naipaul and the New Order," *Kenyon Review* 29 (November 1967), 97. Eric Williams invited Naipaul to tour the Caribbean to assess conditions there. See Chapter 7 for details.

⁵⁰Miller, "Naipaul," 98.

an element that was lacking in his previous work. Nazareth claimed this indicates that Naipaul was increasingly concerned with human values.⁵¹ Naipaul's previous novels described larger than life characters; his novels seemed to be ridiculing West Indian society. *The Mimic Men* did present a more balanced view of life on the island that accurately portrayed its political problems through the eyes of characters who were not eccentric.

Naipaul provided another view of an independent Caribbean country when he launched an attack on revolutionaries who claimed they are trying to bring political, social, and economic stability to the region. He examined life on this unnamed island through the eyes of three young people who become involved in the Black Power movement in the novel *Guerrillas* (1975).⁵² The leading characters are Jane, whom Naipaul describes as a liberal do-good English woman trying to find herself; Peter Roche, a former anti-apartheid activist who no longer acts like a revolutionary; and Jimmy Ahmed, a dissident leader who no longer has a following. It is their interaction that dominates the novel. Jane is an upper-class English woman whose family became wealthy through its colonial connections but who find themselves less important in the post-colonial world. She follows Peter, whom she believes is a political activist out to upset the existing social order on a West Indian island. Peter earns his reputation because he is a white South African who was imprisoned for suspected involvement in acts of anti-apartheid sabotage. Jane expects to find a dynamic Third World country; instead she finds isolation. Peter, it turns out, is now a public relations officer for a company that had its beginnings in the slave trade. Peter gets land, food, and secondhand equipment from

⁵¹Peter Nazareth, "The Mimic Men as a Study of Corruption," *East Africa Journal* 7 (July 1970): 21-22.

⁵²V.S. Naipaul, *Guerrillas* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1975).

the company for Jimmy's commune. Jimmy, of mixed Chinese and African descent, had earned a reputation in London as a radical black leader, although he looks more Chinese than black. The British deported him to the West Indies when he preached Black Power, revolution, and a return to the land, but he has no following on the island. Yet, Meredith, a sophisticated local politician, considers Jimmy a threat just because he is famous. Although Peter helps him out, Jimmy calls him "Massa." The "guerillas" of the novel's title are Jimmy's ineffective commune members.

When Jane arrives at the airport she is accompanied by two representatives of American bauxite companies, whom she met on the plane. They take her past customs without any interference; she never even shows her passport. When she gets bored with Peter, she turns her attention to Jimmy, who begins a relationship with her, although he has a love/hate relationship with England and all things English. He furnishes his house in an English style, believes he is admired in England, and acts superior to local blacks. Naipaul suggests that Jimmy's confusion is a result of colonialism. He rebels against his British past but has nothing with which to replace it. Jimmy eventually kills Jane, whom he sees as too aggressive; Naipaul asserts that her death has nothing to do with the fact that she is British. Peter knows Jimmy is responsible and does not want to be involved in any way, so he destroys any evidence of Jane's stay on the island, which is easy to do since there is no record of her arrival. Peter returns to England to escape further involvement in Jane's death.

The political chaos in the novel reflects the social breakdown on the island. When rioting breaks out in the city, everyone wants to participate. There is no one cause, just general discontentment. Jimmy acts as one of the leaders, but his commune members

do not follow him. Some political leaders try to take responsibility too. The government does not take steps to control the violence. In fact, many of the police take off their uniforms and join the protests. After American helicopters arrive at the airport, everything calms down even though the soldiers never actually leave the airport. The next day, life goes on as usual. Jimmy, though, has been shown as an impotent leader.

Naipaul based the character Jimmy in *Guerillas* on Black Power leader Michael Abdul Malik, who was deported from Britain to Trinidad where he was accused of murdering two people, one of whom was an Englishwoman. Michael X was tried and convicted of murder in 1972 and executed in 1975.⁵³ In the novel, Naipaul portrayed him as a failed leader who established relationships with others who were trying to find meaning in their lives. Even the riots that broke out on the island had no specific cause. People were discontented, but they seemed to be unsure of exactly why. Jimmy and some political leaders all wanted to take responsibility for leading the riots but they failed at that too. Ultimately, it was an outside presence, the Americans, whose mere appearance brought peace.

D.A.N. Jones, an author who was once offered the chance to assist in writing the autobiography of Michael X, said, "The chief merit of *Guerillas* lies in the questions it raises about people's beliefs about other people's beliefs about race, and the insights and conjectures it offers to assist in understanding these subtleties of feeling."⁵⁴ Lillian Feder, professor of English at the City University of New York and the author of a biography of Naipaul, said the novel "portrays the elaborate political and psychic

⁵³*Times* (London), March 3, 1972, 1; *Times* (London), August 22, 1972, 1.

⁵⁴D.A.N. Jones, "Little Warriors in Search of a War," *Times Literary Supplement* (September 12, 1975): 1013.

stratagems devised to avoid the truth of experience during a period of racial conflict on an unidentified Caribbean island that bears a strong resemblance to Trinidad.”⁵⁵

Neville Dawes was another new West Indian writer who explored the political situation in the West Indies. Dawes was born in Warri, Nigeria, in 1926 to Jamaican parents. When he was three years old, the family returned to Jamaica. In 1938 he won a scholarship to Jamaica College in Kingston, then an elite high school for boys. In 1950 he received a degree in English from Oxford. The next year he took a job teaching at the University of the West Indies, but in 1955 he left to teach in Africa. In 1970 he returned to Jamaica as deputy director of the Institute of Jamaica, an organization that administered many of the cultural programs of the government.⁵⁶ Dawes wrote two novels, *The Last Enchantment* (1960) and *Interim* (1978), eighteen years apart, in which he addressed the issues of class interest and conflict of color in Jamaica.⁵⁷ In each, though, he took a different route to reach his conclusion.

Ramsay Tull is the lead character in *The Last Enchantment*, which focuses attention on the relationship of the middle class to politics and social reform. The novel begins in the 1940s when Tull is nineteen years old, bright and bored. He is unable to feel grief at his father’s death. We watch him interact with the Kingston middle class, whose main concern is social climbing. They still admire the British colonial achievements even while they speak of Jamaican nationalism.

⁵⁵Lillian Feder, *Naipaul’s Truth: The Making of a Writer* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 211.

⁵⁶Edward Baugh, “Neville Dawes,” in Dance, ed., *Fifty Caribbean Writers*, 141-142. Dawes also wrote a book of poetry called *In Sepia* in 1958. He 1975 he delivered a series of lectures on Caribbean literature to the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana. These were published in 1977 as *Prolegomena to Caribbean Literature*.

⁵⁷Neville Dawes, *The Last Enchantment* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1960); Neville Dawes, *Interim* (Kingston: Institute of Jamaica, 1978).

Tull, like many middle-class Jamaicans, goes to Oxford University to read English. There he meets a friend from his schooldays, Cyril Hanson, who has become more English than the English, an experience not uncommon among émigrés.⁵⁸ Ramsay describes seeing Cyril with “his rolled umbrella, bowler, black coat, clean white collar, B.N.C. tie, briefcase and a copy of *The Times* under his arm.”⁵⁹ It is not an image that Tull adopts. He chooses to leave England for home when he finishes school.

When Tull returns to the island, he considers becoming involved in politics. There are three main political parties vying for power. The Merchant Party represents the interests of big business, a minority group, but it is able to win the first election after the adoption of the new constitution by buying working-class support through promises of unspecified reforms. Dawes clearly intends his group to signify Bustamante’s political party, the JLP. The second party is the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), “a middle-class party with a vaguely socialist leadership and no programs.”⁶⁰ Dawes intends this party to represent Manley’s PNP. The third party, the People’s Progressive League (PLP), is radically socialist. Although it corresponds to no party in existence in the 1940s, there were members of the PNP who supported more radical views than the party adopted.⁶¹

Tull returns to Jamaica just after the PDP wins the second election by upsetting the Merchant’s Party. It is the PDP that Tull attacks. He credits Dr. Raymond Westlake Phillips, the leader of the PDP with being well-intentioned and sincerely believing in “the

⁵⁸Sam Selvon also wrote about the type in *The Lonely Londoners*; see Chapter 6 for a discussion of the novel. V.S. Naipaul presented a similar character description in *The Mystic Masseur*; see Chapter 5 for details.

⁵⁹Dawes, *The Last Enchantment*, 210.

⁶⁰Dawes, *The Last Enchantment*, 26.

⁶¹See Chapter Two for the details of the establishment and basic political tenets of these Jamaican parties.

inevitability of gradualness.”⁶² However, he considers most of the party leadership middle-class opportunists. Despite the PDP’s campaign promises, there appears to be no real change in life for most people. Bobsie, Tull’s brother, insists that is not true. “You don’t understand what happening in this country today. I tell you black man is really ruling!”⁶³ Bobsie is characteristic of the new ruling class. He is an opportunist and a manipulator, a beneficiary of the corruption once blamed on the British. He demonstrates his own corruption by offering to arrange a headmastership for Tull by simply replacing a powerless incumbent.

Tull floats through the novel waiting for something to happen to him. Politically, he sympathizes with the PPL whose leaders express concern for the problems of the working class. Even though he thinks the party’s leaders are a bit idealistic, he considers becoming actively involved in the PPL when Edgar Bailey, the heir-apparent to the top position, is arrested for having communist literature in his possession. Bailey is also a rival of Tull’s, having proposed marriage to Tull’s mistress. At a march protesting Bailey’s arrest, Tull is hit on the head accidentally by a policeman’s baton. He is the only casualty of the demonstration. The trauma ends his political involvement; he returns to the countryside where he grew up to recuperate. He believe he has no power to change things on the island because not even political parties and mass movements have achieved significant improvements. Although Tull will not be part of it, Bailey predicts that “there’ll be a real revolution right here in Jamaica.”⁶⁴ The novels ends before that takes place.

⁶²Dawes, *The Last Enchantment*, 82.

⁶³Dawes, *The Last Enchantment*, 229.

⁶⁴Dawes, *The Last Enchantment*, 264.

Dawes clearly intended the novel to represent his views of the early promoters of Jamaican nationalism. He believed, as did many others, that the new leaders were too close to the British, that, in fact, they merely wanted to replace the British. He launched his greatest attack on the PNP-like PDP, which many believed was the party most likely to bring significant change to Jamaica because of its socialist-oriented platform. In fact, its actions when elected differed little from those of the JLP, as we saw in chapter seven. Tull represented the middle-class citizen who voted but was not committed to working to achieve social change. He was content to retire to the country and ignore the urban activists and let the government bring about change.

In his review of *The Last Enchantment* Edward Brathwaite, West Indian poet and historian, complained that the novel was more about a political cause than about people.⁶⁵ George Panton argued that Dawes was obsessed with the issue of color.⁶⁶ British novelist Arthur Calder-Marshall, a regular reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement*, called the book “disappointing . . . too long, brash, unselective and fitted with ready-made think-stuff.”⁶⁷

In *Interim*, Dawes’s second novel, the lead characters come from the same mold as Ramsay Tull. James Duncan and his friend from childhood, Lucian Taylor, are the main protagonists. Both benefited from the same educational system. Despite their similar backgrounds, though, they take different routes in life.

Dawes describes the rural beginnings of the two characters in the same hill country from which Ramsay Tull came. There is a sense of community in “the inter-

⁶⁵Edward Brathwaite, “Review of *The Last Enchantment*” *BIM* 9 (July-December 1961): 75.

⁶⁶George Panton, “Have We Really Solved the Race Problem?” *Sunday Gleaner*, March 19, 1961, 14. George Panton is the pen-name for two local reviewers for the newspaper, Cedric Lindo and Hugh P. Morrison.

⁶⁷A. Calder-Marshall, “Trying to Get Back,” *Times Literary Supplement* (July 29, 1960): 485.

relations of near and far blood relations and in-laws that bound the little village together like a single will.”⁶⁸ The people live “in a single and firm relationship to the land, impoverished but unalienated.”⁶⁹ Underneath it all, though, is class tension, represented by a power struggle for the political leadership of the village. The man who holds power is Bushra Burton, a black man and the crude descendant of the slave-owning class, who virtually rules the village from his estate, Nesfield Great House. The two black men who would like to gain power are Teacher Samson and Ebenezer Taylor, Lucian’s father. Although they are not wealthy, the people respect their moral authority. In this scenario Dawes presents a village that is ruled in the style of a British landowner but by a black descendant of slaves.

James and Lucian move to the city when they win scholarships to Victoria College, a high school modeled on Jamaica College, which Dawes attended. At the school both men begin to understand more about the effects of class, color, and colonialism on their society. The young men are treated like lower-class black peasants by the white and mixed-race students and teachers at the school. Lucian suddenly decides to leave school rather than apologize to a teacher. He joins the Royal Air Force (RAF) to fight in World War II. When he returns to the island, he dedicates himself to the idea of revolution. Locals, including James, who remained on the island, have been elected to power, but the government is led by a charismatic prime minister who admires the British, follows their lead, and favors big business.

The revolution takes place, but it soon runs into problems. As its leader, Lucian is too quick to reach an accommodation with the middle class. Complicating the situation

⁶⁸Dawes, *Interim*, 16.

⁶⁹Dawes, *Interim*, 55.

is the fact that Donal Burton, the son of Bushra and another friend of Lucian from childhood, is a pawn of the United States, who has been able to gain a leadership role in the revolutionary government. His inside knowledge allows the United States to send in troops to put down the revolt. Lucian commits suicide over his failure, but at the end of the novel the remnants of the revolutionaries are regrouping in the hills.

Dawes described a Jamaica that locals would recognize. He portrayed a government that seemed much like that of the British. He described an island where a privileged class enjoyed progress but where most people continued to live in poverty. In the village the estate owner dominated; in this case, though, he was black. Those who wanted real change lacked the power and support to stage a real revolution. He described Jamaica in 1978, the year the novel was published.⁷⁰

In these novels West Indian authors displayed their concern with the situation that existed in the newly independent islands of the West Indies. Selvon wrote from London about a West Indian who tried to go home to help his people but found himself alienated from almost everyone he knew, not only because of his education but also because his attitude had changed. He was committed to improving health care for islanders; he had abandoned the West Indian attitude that put play and Carnival first. In the end, he was accepted most by the elite, educated class.

Austin Clarke wrote a novel based on his experiences when he returned to Barbados to work for the newly independent government. He found that he barely understood the language or the people. Corruption and greed were the driving forces of a political elite that wanted power and the wealth associated with it, just as the British had.

⁷⁰I found no contemporary reviews of this novel.

Orlando Paterson also described the problems of an educated West Indian who returned home to find that there was no place for him in his old society. He could not understand who he was. When he went back to England, he found he was an outsider there as well. Patterson seemed to agree with many of his contemporaries that a British education separated them from their past and thrust them into a new society, Britain, which failed to accept them.

Naipaul's protagonist, Ralph Singh, was an economic success when he returned home but that left him wanting more. He turned to politics but discovered two things: first, that as an East Indian he was separated from the majority black population by racial tension; second, that once he achieved political power he still had no real control because the island was dependent on foreign aid to survive. He too returned to London in despair. Naipaul's other novel focused attention on failed revolutionaries. The island he described was politically unstable. His three revolutionaries had all abandoned that role as they searched for meaning in their lives. When riots broke out because the local people were frustrated by the economic and social failures of the government, both Jimmy, the would-be Black Power radical, and rival political leaders tried to take responsibility for the protests.

Neville Dawes wrote two books about the problems of returning émigrés. In the first, after being educated in England, Ramsay Tull failed to establish a place for himself on his newly independent home island. He found that political promise led nowhere once a party came to power. Tull despaired of ever having any positive effect on the island on his own. In his second novel, Dawes introduced Lucian Taylor. He came from a similar background as Ramsay Tull, but Taylor opted for political revolution to change the

island's government. As leader of the revolution, though, he found it necessary to compromise with the economic elite on the island to survive. Eventually the Americans put down the revolution. In both of Dawes's novels, attempted political change failed.

Historical Perspectives

In novels they wrote in these years, Lamming and Naipaul also used an historical perspective to understand how the West Indies developed as they did. Lamming looked at the foundations of life in the Caribbean in *Natives of My Person* (1972), which is based on one of the early voyages from England to the West Indies.⁷¹ He says that the ship represents the colonial quest for domination. The novel provides a look at how the West Indies came to be what they are, through the subjugation of the Indian population, the introduction of African slavery, and the exploitation of the islands under colonialism. Lamming begins by pointing out that Europeans believe non-Europeans lack humanity. They use this belief to justify their exploitation. Pierre, the ship's carpenter, describes the Africans as less than human because they go "naked everywhere like beasts" and possess unusual sexual powers.⁷²

Lamming tells the tale through the voyage of the *Reconnaissance*, a ship secretly restored for a six month trip that takes it from Europe, specifically a fictional place called Lime Stone, meant to represent England, which is governed by the House of Trade and Justice, to the Guinea Coast and onto the West Indies. The Commandant of the voyage believes that the slave trade has brought both wealth and moral corruption to Europe. He vows to establish a new utopian society on San Cristobal that is without corruption.

⁷¹George Lamming, *Natives of My Person* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, [1972] 1992).

⁷²Lamming, *Natives*, 120; George E. Kent, "A Conversation with George Lamming," *Black World* 22 (March 1973): 96.

Of the Commandant's general character none may now be in doubt, and one detail has been especially observed and reported on by all. He appears to have little taste for personal fortune. The conditions of service that he there made known to officers and men alike are proof that no common greed supports his intention; his general purpose is to explore and settle the territory commonly known as the Isles of the Black Rock, or more lately named San Cristobal.⁷³

The Commandant is driven to give up the slave trade after his lover, the Lady of the House, abandons him because he repeatedly breaks his promise not to go to sea in pursuit of imperial goals. He believes that his new society will be a place where they can be reunited. "Now my ambition is in reverse; and I reckon it is a more noble preference to plant some portion of Lime Stone in the virgin territories of San Cristobal. This purpose I declare to be absolute and true."⁷⁴ His wife is waiting for him on San Cristobal.

The officers begin their journey believing that they will become rich picking up their African cargo. Very early in the voyage they become suspicious when they discover that the Commandant is not taking the most direct route to Africa. When they arrive, though, it appears that this will be an ordinary trip until the Commandant sends them a message:

Contrary to your expectations, and notwithstanding the bold expeditions made by Boatswain among the natives of this coast, our vessel, *Reconnaissance*, will receive no cargoes of black flesh but proceed with its original crew for the Isles of the Black Rock. Any plot by officers or common hands to bring into personal possession such cargoes of black flesh will be considered a capital offense against our orders. The punishment will be death, and without the customary delay of open trial.⁷⁵

⁷³Lamming, *Natives*, 25.

⁷⁴Lamming, *Natives*, 17.

⁷⁵Lamming, *Natives*, 129.

The officers and men are confused but still believe the Commandant has a purpose. When some officers learn that the Commandant intends to reunite them with their wives, who are also opposed to the slave trade, they kill him rather than give up their lucrative business. They, in turn, are killed by the cabin boy, Sasha, who had always remained loyal to the Commandant. The expedition continues but with no clear direction.

Lamming meant the Commandant to represent the early independence leaders in the Caribbean, men like Manley and Williams. He believed that their goal of independence was compromised by their admiration for and commitment to Britain and its political and economic systems. They could not, or would not, escape Britain's influence. The determination of the crew represents the determination of the common man to shape the future of West Indian society, but Lamming does not say how this might happen.⁷⁶ Lamming himself said,

Natives of My Person is not about the sixteenth–seventeenth–century age of reconnaissance; it is a critical exploration of what was happening in the twentieth century post-Independence period. You could interpret the commandant in *Natives* as a composite figure of the Caribbean boss-leader. The commandant could be a composite of Williams [and] Manley, that figure who came up and was chosen, but once in the seat of authority, ruled in that kind of way. The democratic process never got internalized in Caribbean society. Structures that might be called democratic were established, but they were never fully accepted as workable for normal day-to-day living.⁷⁷

Sally Cunneen, a professor of Philosophy at Rockland Community College, wrote that *Natives of My Person* was

⁷⁶Ian Munro, "George Lamming," in Bruce King, ed., *West Indian Literature* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1979), 139.

⁷⁷Frank Birbalsingh, ed., *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 19.

a profound and elegantly written novel in which the darkly mixed motives that lay behind the European colonization of the New World find dramatic form in the officers and crew on a mysterious voyage to the Caribbean. It is a fiction rich enough to sustain its fearful reminders of the still unpaid cost of centuries of racial, economic and sexual domination.⁷⁸

Another reviewer described the voyage as imaginary, where “the Commandant leading the expedition dreams of establishing an ideal colony, untainted either by slavery or by the various forms of greed and lust to be found in Lime Stone’s all powerful and all corrupt House of Trade and Justice.”⁷⁹ Later, Ian Munro, who interviewed Lamming in 1972, claimed that

Lamming establishes the essential pattern of West Indian history, from the subjugation and looting of its Indian civilisations to the terrifying monstrosities of slavery, to the exploitation of the islands under various forms of European colonialism.⁸⁰

Natives of My Person was the first of Lamming’s novels to be published in the United States before it was released in Britain, an occurrence he described as unusual even as late as 1972.⁸¹

Naipaul also turned to an examination of the historical and psychological causes of the problems of the West Indies in *The Loss of El Dorado* (1965).⁸² The novel is about two moments of early Trinidadian history, the extermination of the Amerindians, exemplified by the discovery of Port of Spain in 1592 by Antonio de Berrio, and the introduction of slaves, exemplified by the torture of a teenage mulatto girl during the

⁷⁸Sally Cunneen, “Review of *Natives of My Person*,” *Commonweal* 97 (December 8, 1972): 234.

⁷⁹“Review of *Natives of My Person*,” *New Yorker* 48 (April 29, 1972): 140.

⁸⁰Ian Munro, “George Lamming,” 138.

⁸¹Ian Munro and Reinhard Sander, eds., *Kas-Kas: Interviews with Three Caribbean Writers in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas, 1972), 17.

⁸²V.S. Naipaul, *The Loss of El Dorado* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, [1965] 1970).

tenure of the first British governor, Thomas Picton. Naipaul contends that it is mistaken idealism that produces colonial empires because without the traditions, restraints, and competition of the metropolis, settler society loses its way and it becomes ignorant, feeding upon envy and racial distinctions. The legacy of the system is brutality, confusion, and anger. The worst tyrants in the book begin with high ideals and good intentions but turn to the use of power to uphold their ideals in the midst of chaos. They become corrupted.

In part one of the novel, Naipaul tells the story of Antonio de Berrio, the governor of Trinidad, and his search for El Dorado. “For the conquistador the El Dorado adventure ended in kidnap, solitude and lunacy. His province – the dream of the third Spanish marquisate in the New World, after Mexico and Peru – became the ghost province of the Spanish Empire.”⁸³ The explorers never find wealth. They only succeed in destroying the native population.

Naipaul spends a brief time describing the next two hundred years when Trinidad was a “ghost province” within the Spanish Empire. Because it lacked the wealth found in other Spanish settlements, few Spaniards moved to the island. Because of that, Spain used land grants to attract French Catholics to settle in Trinidad from neighboring islands. In 1791 Spain surrendered the island to Britain. Thomas Picton arrived to govern the island.

The second part deals with the torture of a teenage – part Spanish, part native – girl, Luisa Calderon, whose lover had accused her of theft. Torture is used to make her confess. Jean-Baptiste Vallot, the cruel jailor, is paid a fee for each flogging, ear-clipping, and torture by suspension he performed. St. Hilaire Begorrat is the chief

⁸³Naipaul, *El Dorado*, 3.

magistrate who orders the punishments. Both are long-time French residents. When Picton takes charge the British leave him alone to govern. His orders are to keep the island British and maintain internal security. He takes his appointed task seriously. According to Naipaul, Picton establishes his own personal tyranny. He inflicts his terror on anyone who disobeys his orders, including British soldiers, but he saves his harshest punishments for slaves and free, mixed-race inhabitants. The French elite cooperate with him willingly. Begorrat and Picton become close friends; Picton signs all of Begorrat's torture orders without question. Colonel William Fullarton, a British commissioner sent to investigate Picton's reign, has him brought to trial in London for the Calderon incident. Picton is found guilty at his first trial, because torture was illegal under Spanish law, but at a second trial he is acquitted.

Naipaul describes Trinidad in the next one hundred fifty years of its history as a "ghost province" of the British Empire. According to Naipaul, ". . . it was clear that Picton was being tried for being governor of a slave colony [at the end of the eighteenth century]. He was the victim of people's conscience, of ideas of humanity and reason that were ahead of the reality."⁸⁴

He concludes by pointing out that each event created a sensation when it happened, but then each became lost to history; he sees this as the result of colonialism. In an epilogue he portrays himself as a stranger in Trinidad, where

Picton was the name of a street; no one knew more. History was a fairytale about Columbus and a fairytale about the strange customs of the aboriginal Caribs and Arawaks; it was impossible now to set them in the landscape. . . . History was also a fairytale not so much about slavery as about its abolition, the good defeating the bad. . . . The slave was never real. Like the extinct

⁸⁴Naipaul, *El Dorado*, 131.

aboriginal, he had to be reconstructed from his daily routine. So he remains . . . only in the imagination. In the records the slave is faceless, with an identification rather than a name. He has no story.⁸⁵

Naipaul believed that West Indian society, and especially Trinidadian society, had been corrupted by colonialism. He intended these two historical events to portray that corruption. The founders and subsequent rulers of the island showed no concern for the native population. Naipaul believed that Trinidad continued to suffer from the legacy of colonialism. In 1962, he wrote

In the colonial society every man had to be for himself; every man had to grasp whatever dignity and power he was allowed; he owed no loyalty to the island . . . To understand this is to understand the squalor of the politics that came to Trinidad in 1946 when, after no popular agitation, universal adult suffrage was declared. The privilege took the population by surprise. Old attitudes persisted: the government was something removed, the local eminence was despised.⁸⁶

Author Bruce Bawer described the novel as “a comprehensive history of Trinidad’s colonial era, the particulars of which were so terrible that Naipaul felt compelled to present them straightforwardly.”⁸⁷ West Indian literary critic Bruce King called the novel “a selective but detailed examination of two moments of early Trinidadian history which left a national legacy of confusion and anger. Naipaul’s focus has changed from his early satiric reports of Trinidad into an exploration of the historical and psychological causes of the region’s problems.”⁸⁸

⁸⁵Naipaul, *El Dorado*, 324.

⁸⁶V.S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage* (New York: Vintage Books, [1962] 2001), 69.

⁸⁷Bruce Bawer, “Civilization and V.S. Naipaul,” *The Hudson Review* 55 (Autumn 2002): 376-377.

⁸⁸Bruce King, “V.S. Naipaul,” in King, ed., *West Indian Literature*, 170.

In these two novels Lamming and Naipual tried to look back in history to explain the modern West Indies. Lamming argued that slavery and colonialism produced a culture where greed and personal gain came before concern for those who suffered under colonialism. When the officers of the *Reconnaissance* learned that the commandant intended to reunite them with wives who wanted to stop their lucrative slave trade, they killed the commandant. Lamming himself said that he meant the commandant to represent local politicians like Williams and Manley, whom he believed asserted boss-like power once they were in office.

Naipaul's historical novel dealt specifically with Trinidad. He described an island that was founded in hope but suffered years of neglect under both Spanish and British colonial governments. Luisa Calderon was a mixed-race girl, which meant she was a member of the lower class. Neither the French torturer, the French magistrate, nor the British governor saw anything wrong with torturing a girl who was accused of theft. Even when Picton, the British governor, was put on trial in England, he was acquitted. Once again, the native population had no power and no rights under the colonial system.

Conclusion

These West Indian novelists pursued themes both consistent with, and different from, their earlier books. First, they continued to point out that life in Britain, even after all their years of residence, was difficult for them. Selvon and Lamming wrote about West Indians living in London many years after the early migrations that followed World War II. Selvon's Moses believed he had adjusted: he bought a home and set about writing his memoirs. Still, his West Indian attitudes persisted – he believed he was

superior to the Indians he encountered and he admired European authors but had no knowledge of West Indian writers.

Lamming's characters were artists who fled islands that offered them little opportunity to pursue their careers. When they did not succeed in London, they blamed the British and lashed out in violent rages. The islanders expected to be taken care of by the British because that was their experience growing up in a colonial society.

Second, West Indian novelists now attacked the new local governments, pointing out their inconsistencies and the difficulties they faced, but challenging them to do better. Many of these authors wrote about West Indians who went overseas for an education and returned home to island where they were no longer comfortable. Selvon's *Mark*, a doctor who wanted to help people, had to adapt to life among middle-class urban residents who were strangers to him. Patterson's *Blackman*, who taught at the university, was never comfortable with friends and family he had left behind. He returned to England where he was also an outsider. Naipaul's *Singh* entered politics to improve his island, but he found he had no control. He too returned to England. Dawes's *Tull* found politics too stressful and ineffective and fled to the countryside. Dawes's *Taylor* was a failed revolutionary, as were Naipaul's characters, Jane, Peter, and Jimmy. Clarke's *John Moore* had been away for so many years that he could barely understand native accents. All these novels presented educated West Indians who could not find a way to solve the problems of their native islands. Many of the novels also portrayed local island leaders as greedy and corrupt. Most, however, were just incapable of dealing with overwhelming problems that confronted them.

Third, these novelists continued to blame the British for having failed them during the colonial period. Lamming and Naipaul went back in time to establish the basis for the repressive colonial system. Lamming blamed the introduction of slavery, but at the same time he used the aborted attempt to end the slave trade as an example of the ineffective leadership of modern West Indian leaders. Naipaul blamed the repressive British colonial system itself. All of the novels, though, contained an indictment of colonialism in the form of West Indians who were not accepted in London, or West Indians educated in British who could not adapt when they went home, or island leaders who could not cope with mounting problems in the West Indies because they had no training and no experience of leadership.

CHAPTER IX
PLANTATION, VILLAGE, AND SLUM LIFE
1961-1979

“What an Island! What a People!”¹

After the islands of the West Indies began to gain their independence, several writers decided to look again at the status of the poorest members of society, those living in rural villages and urban slums. In this chapter we look at those novels. Orlando Patterson wrote an historical novel about slave life on an eighteenth century plantation and the ability of slaves to assert a measure of control over their environment. Sam Selvon authored two novels and Austin Clarke one about life in rural villages whose future was closely tied modern-day estates. Earl Lovelace, Sylvia Wynter, and Clarke wrote about some of the problems encountered by residents who lived in rural villages that were not associated with agricultural estates. Ismith Khan, Lovelace, and Patterson wrote about the urban poor who continued to struggle to be recognized. These novels show that there had been no significant change in the lives of most of the poorest inhabitants of the islands.

¹Louise Bennett, “Colonization in Reverse,” in John Figueroa, ed., *An Anthology of African and Caribbean Writing in English* (London: Heinemann, 1982), 255.

Historic Plantations

Orlando Patterson and Jean Rhys wrote historical novels that focused on slavery and its aftermath. Their goal was to illuminate a cause for the situation in which most West Indians found themselves in the late twentieth century.

Patterson's novel, *Die the Long Day*, is an historical novel about slavery and plantation life in eighteenth-century Jamaica.² The story revolves around Quasheba, a slave woman, and her efforts to save her daughter Polly from the attentions of a syphilitic plantation owner. Patterson points out that white society failed to provide any leadership or moral values for its slave population. The absentee owners hire weak, corrupt men to run their plantations. Between the white owners and managers and the black slaves are skilled mulattoes like Benjamin, who want their freedom. Benjamin looks white. When his black grandmother teases him about his true heritage she slaps her. As he is about to get his freedom, he finds that not everyone who is free is happy. Reverend Abbercromby, the Methodist minister of the church he attends, is afraid political leaders will think Ben is preaching sedition by leaving the plantation and joining a white church and encouraging others to follow his example. He suggests that Benjamin attend the black Baptist Church instead. On his way back to the plantation, Ben encounters his friend Jason who tells him that being a free person of color does not allow for hope. "There is nothing for us to do for the country has no need of us. The only useful people in this place are the slaves and, of course, their masters. You are a parasite here if you belong to neither group."³ By the time Benjamin gets back to the estate, he has decided to stay there where he is comfortable; his job on the plantation allows him a certain

²Orlando Patterson, *Die the Long Day* (New York: Morrow, 1972).

³Patterson, *Die the Long Day*, 208.

amount of independence and he will be protected from the struggle of trying to survive in white society.

In another storyline, Patterson shows that not everyone starts out wanting to dehumanize the slaves. McKenzie, the young bookkeeper on the plantation, is at first unwilling to adopt the customs of the country, which to whites means the inhuman treatment of the slaves, sexual license, and the brutal, self-indulgent life of the masters. After five weeks on the plantation he asks himself,

what spirit of madness had moved him to leave the civilized bosom of his beloved Edinburgh to come to this miserable island? This hot, steamy, fever-ridden slave camp amid a wilderness of alien, godless savages and uncouth, money-grabbing whites.⁴

Yet, a few days later he becomes so exasperated when a slave will not give him a straight answer that he beats her savagely. The other whites told him it would happen – that he would become accustomed to the brutality of life on the plantation. He cannot believe it has happened to him, though. David, another bookkeeper, describes how the acceptance of brutality was inevitable, because the whites have to keep the slaves in line to maintain control.

There are some slaves . . . we never quite succeed in breaking. Most of them we do a good job on. It's the only way we keep the place together . . . they outnumber us ten to one. With all our military might, if they decided to rise up against us we wouldn't stand a chance. So only by forcing them into submission and fear do we manage to keep our heads.⁵

⁴Patterson, *Die the Long Day*, 36-37.

⁵Patterson, *Die the Long Day*, 85.

While he is trying to convince himself that he will never let the slaves entice him into brutal actions again, McKenzie succumbs to the advances of a young slave girl whose mother has convinced her that her life will be better if she has a white man to protect her.

Throughout the book, the plantation slaves manage to preserve their dignity and self-respect. For example, they organize work slow-downs when the manager gets too brutal; when they are whipped, they accept the punishment with a dignified silence; and sometimes the slave women entice the white men into sexual relationships that give them a certain amount of power over the men. The slaves' spirit of solidarity enables them to establish their own social values. In the end, Quasheba fails to protect her daughter and dies. At her funeral, Africanus, whom Patterson describes as a wise man, says, "It take courage, it take a great people, to preserve body and mind through all this. Our children will see it this way, and they'll be proud."⁶

Patterson's portrayal of slavery focused on the inhumanity of the white population that ran the plantation and the courage of the black slaves who worked under them. McKenzie arrived on the plantation determined to remain outside the brutality, but in the end he too beat a slave and was enticed into a relationship with a young slave girl. Patterson's slaves have different problems. Benjamin, who looked white, was poised to get his freedom, but when he went to visit friends in town he realized that he would not be totally free; he would be placed in an inferior position to the white population that would still control his life. As a skilled worker, he had a great deal of freedom on the plantation so he decided to stay where he was protected. Quasheba tried to save her daughter from a syphilitic white owner. She failed, but her efforts won her the respect of her fellow slaves. At her funeral a wise old slave reminded the others that their

⁶Patterson, *Die the Long Day*, 253.

descendents would respect them for maintaining their self-respect under the terrible conditions of slavery.

Patterson's novel can be seen as a call to the black population of Jamaica, and the West Indies, to fight for their rights. He presented a situation in which whether they were slave or free in the nineteenth century, blacks had no rights in a British-dominated white society. Benjamin opted for security rather than freedom and a possible chance to change life for himself and his fellow slaves. In order to survive, blacks manipulated their masters whenever possible. This was a habit they passed down to their descendents even after Emancipation. Patterson's novel explained why many blacks were unwilling to take steps to improve their lives. The message of Patterson and other authors to follow was directed at the majority of the black population that had failed to prosper under the new black governments: Blacks must call attention to their own needs and begin making demands on the government in a responsible way.

Jan Carew, the Guyanese novelist, said that Patterson's novel was essential for understanding contemporary West Indian society. He also praised Patterson for his psychological exploration of slave society.⁷ Cedric Lindo, a reviewer for the Jamaican newspaper, said, "Dr. Patterson has performed a most useful service for modern Jamaica."⁸ John Hearne, the Jamaican novelist, claimed that Patterson lacked skill as a fiction writer, but praised his "sociological-historical exactitude."⁹

⁷Jan Carew, "Review of *Die the Long Day*." *New York Times Book Review*, September 10, 1972, 46. Carew, of course, believed that it was essential for West Indians to explore their past in order to establish a future; see Chapter 1.

⁸Cedric Lindo, "Review of *Die the Long Day*, *Sunday Gleaner*, August 26, 1972, 45.

⁹John Hearne, "The Novel as Sociology as Bore," *Caribbean Quarterly* 18 (December 1972): 78-81.

Life on sugar plantations was an essential part of West Indian history that defined social relations even after independence. Patterson described an eighteenth century plantation where white masters were harsh and slaves preserved their dignity by undermining the system a black attitude that persisted into the twentieth century. The message of the novel was clear – the black population of the West Indies was responsible for its own future

Modern Day Rural Estates

In the 1960s and 70s, West Indian writers also explored the problems of rural residents who continued to rely on local sugar estates for most of their income. Sam Selvon and Austin Clark wrote about the problems these rural inhabitants faced.

In 1970 Tate & Lyle, the English sugar estate owner, commissioned Sam Selvon to write about sugar production in conjunction with the celebration of “Agriculture Year.” Selvon produced *The Plains of Caroni*.¹⁰ In the novel Selvon explores the issues of peasant opposition to mechanization, a problem encountered by both private owners and local governments when they tried to increase production or train workers in new techniques. The novel is set on a privately-owned sugar estate in Trinidad. When the estate gets a new cane harvester, Romesh, recently hired and with a university education, is the only one to welcome it. According to Romesh, “The bogey of the harvesting machine was the greatest threat of all. . . . But there could be no holding back or delay if the sugar industry was to prosper and benefit the island’s economy as a whole.”¹¹ His uncle Balgobin, a champion cane cutter, damages the engine beyond repair. He cannot accept a machine that will undermine his prestige among his fellow cutters. When the

¹⁰Sam Selvon, *The Plains of Caroni* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1970).

¹¹Selvon, *Caroni*, 56.

estate workers want to protest mechanization, the union backs their decision. Local politicians also choose to support the workers. Although island government often encounters similar problems as it encourages mechanization to improve the local economy on its own land, politicians need the support of unions to get the workers' votes.

In a subtext to the novel, Selvon also deals with the racial problems of Trinidad, an issue that appears in most of his novels. Seeta, Romesh's mother, encourages him to pursue Petra, whose white skin Seeta perceives as a token of success. When Romesh is nearly mobbed by local blacks as a "white Indian" because of his leadership position on the estate, it is Petra who saves him. At the end of the novel, Romesh's frustration with the estate workers and the racism he experiences on the island causes him and Petra to move to safety in London.

Selvon used *The Plains of Caroni* to call attention to two problems Trinidad faced in 1970. The first was how to bring modern technology to local agriculture. Many local villages depended upon the sugar estate to keep the village economically stable. Almost every family had some tie to the estate, as full-time worker, part-time worker, or shopkeeper and bar owner dependent upon the income of the villagers. Mechanization threatened to reduce the number of workers the estate hired. It also threatened to reduce the prestige of some workers, like Balgobin, who was known and admired in the village for his skill as a cane cutter.

The second problem Selvon explored was the racial tension that existed in Trinidad. As Selvon had shown in other novels, racial tension existed between blacks and East Indians in Trinidad. It dated from the nineteenth century when East Indians had arrived to work as indentured servants on sugar plantations that might not have survived

without their labor. Blacks resented them for that and looked down upon them as slaves. The antagonism had persisted even after independence. In a racial subtext, any educated West Indian who adopted British attitudes, like Romesh did when he encouraged mechanization, was criticized by the local population for trying to please the master to get ahead. As Patterson showed in his work, most blacks believed they should be undermining estate owners rather than working with them.

Selvon's novel presented problems that the Trinidadian government had failed to change by 1970. Black peasants remained dependent on estate owners for at least a portion of their income. Often whole villages could not have survived without the estate, usually white-owned, that continued to dominate their lives. The racial tension that existed between blacks and East Indians continued, had even increased, since independence.¹²

In an overly harsh indictment, Frank Birbalsingh, a West Indian literary critic, called the novel "a collection of sketches and anecdotes jumbled together in flimsy frames of romantic intrigue."¹³ Another West Indian literary critic, Michael Fabre, praised Selvon for producing a novel that shows the concerns of the modern-day peasant class, particularly as it concerns modernization.¹⁴

In 1972 Selvon wrote *Those Who Eat the Cascadura*, based on his experience of village life when he spent some time in the Trinidadian village of Tacarigua in 1969.¹⁵ The novel is set in fictional Sans Souci, a rural village that is economically dependent

¹²See Chapter 7 for details of recent black-East Indian tensions.

¹³Frank Birbalsingh, "Samuel Selvon and the West Indian Literary Renaissance," *Ariel* 8 (1977): 18.

¹⁴Fabre, "Samuel Selvon," in Bruce King., ed. *West Indian Literature* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1979), 120.

¹⁵Sam Selvon, *Those Who Eat the Cascadura* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1972).

upon a cacao estate owned and managed by an Englishman, Roger Franklin. The main character is Gary Johnson, a writer researching West Indian folkways, who is a guest on Franklin's estate. The Indian overseer, Viakash, hates Johnson because of his relationship to Sarojini, an Indian woman. His hate turns to violence when he tries to rape Sarojini as a punishment for her affair. In the end, Johnson returns to London without Sarojini. Franklin's housekeeper sums up the situation for Sarojini, implying that the outcome was inevitable:

What happen done and finish with. Mr. Johnson is a *big* white man what living in England, and he was only here on holiday, and the two of you like one another, and no he gone back to England. Crick crack, monkey break my back, wire bend and the story end.¹⁶

Selvon also introduced the use of the supernatural by the black working class. As part of his research, Johnson investigates the use of obeah, an ancient African ritual that black peasants adopt as part of their heritage. The use of obeah by black plantation workers is their way of distancing themselves from white authority, and from East Indian culture, and establishing their own place in society.¹⁷

The novel portrays the relationship between the estate and the village, which is totally dependent on the estate for its existence, but Franklin has no concern for the people of Sans Souci. The relationship is colonial, with the villagers "unaffected by any thought of freedom from the white man's grip."¹⁸ At the end of the novel Franklin is considering merging his property with that of a local landowner; he gives no thought to

¹⁶Selvon, *Cascadura*, 128.

¹⁷ Obeah refers to an African cult practice that survives in the religious life of the lower class, whatever their race or religion. Those who believe in obeah accept that a spirit can possess them. The obeahman often provides potions that might cure one of illness or help one find love. See Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and Its Background* (London: Heinemann, 1983), 123-125.

¹⁸Selvon, *Cascadura*, 28.

the effect this might have on the village. Yet the villagers continue to accept his authority and privilege without question.

Selvon wrote about a group of people still unable to affect their own future in the late twentieth century. They were dependent upon the cacao estate not only for their individual financial security but for the survival of the village as well. The villagers were accustomed to being governed by the estate owner; they could not think about challenging his authority. George Lamming wrote about the same attitude in a 1930s village in Barbados in *In the Castle of My Skin*.¹⁹ In the midst of the upheavals of the 1930s those residents found the courage to rebel. In the 1960s, with local governments unable to provide a better life for rural residents, villagers continued to rely on the estate owner for their daily existence. Selvon's novel was a subtle critique of a system of land ownership that had persisted since the end of slavery.

In a contemporary anonymous review for the *Times Literary Supplement*, the reviewer ignored the social value of the novel, calling it "a thoroughly unpleasant and disappointing piece of work, riddled with every cliché of cheap romantic fiction."²⁰

Several years later, Michael Fabre, a West Indian literary critic, praised Selvon for using the novel to deal with the wide range of social tensions found on a modern-day sugar estate.²¹

Austin Clarke also addressed some of the problems of rural villagers who were dependent upon estates in *Survivors of the Crossing* (1964).²² Clarke's novel is about Rufus, a semi-educated black peasant worker and agitator on a sugarcane plantation, who

¹⁹See Chapter 5 for details of this novel.

²⁰"Storm-Tossed," *Times Literary Supplement* (February 11, 1972): 145.

²¹Fabre, "Samuel Selvon," in King, ed., *West Indian Literature*, 121.

²²Austin Clarke, *The Survivors of the Crossing* (Toronto: McClelland and Steward, 1964).

wants to revolt against the white-controlled establishment and introduce socialism. Rufus and his friend Jackson attend meetings of the Bridgetown Labour Party.

They would spend long hours arguing with the young, educated party leaders, talking about the low wages of labourers, about the conditions of work on the plantation on which they worked, and about the dependency of their entire village on the plantation.²³

They vowed to work together to solve their problems, but when he gets a chance, Jackson leaves the village and the island. His letters from Canada, in which he talks about the freedom and prosperity he found there, inspire Rufus to organize a revolt on the plantation.

Rufus's friend Boysie, who also works on the estate, is two-timing and weak, but Rufus has to rely on him to read the letters because Rufus is illiterate, a condition of many rural islanders in the 1960s and beyond. The letters describe Jackson's life of freedom in detail. He works a forty-hour week. He is on a first-name basis with the boss; he does not have to tip his hat and appear subservient when they meet. He is a member of a union. Rufus, who describes himself as a progressive socialist, decides that he and Boysie need to go on strike. He wants to show the plantation owner that the villagers are not dependent upon him. The workers that Rufus calls on to support the strike are poor villagers who survive any way they can.

They were poor, as poor as a cane-field worker is poor. For they worked only part of the year. That was during the reaping of the canes. For the rest of the year they repaired houses for their friends or neighbors, fixed old shoes, bicycles, and did other such around-the-house jobs.²⁴

²³Clarke, *Survivors*, 5.

²⁴Clarke, *Survivors*, 36.

Stella, Rufus's common-law wife with whom he has two children, is treated like a sexual chattel by everyone. She sleeps with the Jockey, the overseer on the plantation, so Rufus can keep his job in the slow season even though younger men do more work. Biscome, the rum shop owner, also exploits Stella by taking sexual favors in exchange for money that she needs to feed her family. Stella is another example of the West Indian woman who does what she has to in order to survive.

When Rufus and his supporters decide to go talk to the plantation owner before they strike, Biscome warns him so he can set a trap. Rufus is shot in the leg. The next day he and Boysie go to work as usual as though nothing happened. Rufus finds out that it was Biscome who betrayed him and make plans to retaliate, but Stella and Boysie both warn Biscome. Rufus begins to feel isolated.

When Rufus calls his friend Jackson to tell him what has happened, he finds out that the letter was a lie. Jackson washes cars for eighty cents an hour. "I couldn't let you know that up here in this country is the same slavery as what I run from back in the island."²⁵ Rufus decides to proceed with the strike anyway. He is arrested and beaten.

After Rufus is convicted of assault with intent to maim, the villagers refuse to go back to work on the plantation. When the owner brings in workers from the country, the villagers attack them and scare them away. After two months the plantation owner offers to forgive them and take them back. They accept. When Rufus escapes from jail and burns the cane field, he is arrested again, tried, and sent to jail for twenty years. Life in the village remains unchanged.

Clarke's novel accurately portrayed the life of sugar estate workers in the 1960s. Like other authors in this period, he depicts whole villages that depended upon the estate

²⁵Clarke, *Survivors*, 91.

to supplement their income. Clarke used the discontent so readily apparent among workers on modern sugar estates to show how ineffective peasant protest was, especially under island governments that continued to put the welfare of the wealthy elite first. The politicians who used socialist rhetoric to inspire Rufus never came to his aid during his rebellion. Rural peasants remained trapped in a system from which there appeared to be little chance of escape.

Literary critic W.S. Keir called the book funny but sad.²⁶ Edward Baugh, a member of the Department of English at the University of the West Indies, called *Survivors of the Crossing* “a failure, crudely propagandizing, overambitious and rather hysterical in its angry, implausible narrative of a latter-day uprising on a Barbadian sugar plantation.”²⁷

Both of Selvon’s novels of these years described villages dependent on the local estate. In the village of San Souci, the cacao estate owner was ready to merge his property with that of another landowner without any concern for how it might affect the villagers. In *The Plains of Caroni*, the villagers protested the introduction of mechanization that might cost them their jobs and would cost one of them the prestige he earned by being an expert cane cutter. In both novels racial problems were a subtext. In San Souci, a white visitor had an affair with an East Indian woman whom he abandoned when he went back to England. In Selvon’s other novel, an East Indian man became involved in a relationship with a light-skinned black woman who passed for white. They eventually fled the island for England.

²⁶W.S. Keir, “Raw Caribbean,” *Times Literary Supplement* (October 15, 1964): 933.

²⁷Baugh, “Since 1960,” 81.

Clarke's estate worker, Rufus, had been influenced by the new socialist ideas on the island. He planned a revolt on the estate, but the villagers, who were dependent on the estate for their survival, failed to follow him. When he was sent to prison, the local residents at first refused to work on the estate but eventually they had to agree to go back to work for their own survival.

Each of these novels presented several issues with which West Indian politicians still had to struggle in the 1960s and 70s. The rural population of the islands continued to be dependent upon estate owners, generally white, for their survival. In *Those Who Eat the Cascadura*, Selvon presented a white landowner who failed to take into account the effect on the village that his merger with another owner might bring about. The efforts of independence governments to bring reform had failed to change a situation that had existed for centuries.

In Clarke's village a black estate worker who tried to adopt the socialist rhetoric of some of the island's politicians could not get the villagers to follow him because the estate was their major source of income. They feared that the village would not survive if the plantation did not survive. Again, local government and local politicians who preached socialist rhetoric, had failed to find a solution to rural dependence on white owners.

Selvon also pointed out the continued existence of racial prejudice on the islands. As we saw in Chapter 7, the relationship between blacks and East Indians in Trinidad deteriorated with independence. East Indians, who had trusted the British to treat them at least as well as the black population, feared that black leaders would discriminate against them. This, too, was a problem that the black government of Trinidad had failed to solve.

Each of the novels showed that the lives of rural inhabitants on the new independent islands remained much as they had been under British colonialism. The message the novelists sent was that a change of attitude had to inspire rural peasants to seek change on their own. They could not expect the government to abandon its commitment to growing the economy by supporting business owners.

Life in Rural Villages

Isolated villages that were not dependent upon an estate for financial survival also found themselves struggling to integrate into modern society in the West Indies. One of the authors who addressed this topic was Earl Lovelace. Lovelace was born in Toco, Trinidad in 1935. He grew up in Tobago and Port of Spain and studied in Trinidad and the United States. He worked as a journalist and teacher in Trinidad and the United States. In the 1980s he returned to Trinidad where he began his career in creative writing and worked as a journalist. He also lectured at the University of the West Indies. In his work he focused on the attempts of islanders to fit into the new local societies developing on the islands.²⁸

Lovelace's *The Schoolmaster* (1968) is about life in a remote rural village, which, despite its poverty, is unified and secure, relying on traditions and stable families to ground it.²⁹ The village maintains little contact with the outside world. Lovelace says, "In a place like Kumaca . . . everybody is one."³⁰ The villagers decide they want progress so they need a school to educate their children. The local priest, Father Vincent,

²⁸Daryl Cumber Dance, "Earl Lovelace," in Dance, ed., *Fifty Caribbean Writers*, 276-277; Dance, *New World Adams*, 146-152.

²⁹Earl Lovelace, *The Schoolmaster* (London: Heinemann, [1968] 1979).

³⁰Lovelace, *The Schoolmaster*, 95.

a white man, opposes the idea because he knows that progress will corrupt the village as it did in the nearby town of Valencia.

Kumaca . . . is simple and beautiful. [The] people are good, honest, simple, hard-working, and in the season, God willing, your crop is good. Maybe you are not learned like the doctors and lawyers of the city but you believe in the Virgin, and in the Father and in His Son who died for us all. You live happy, with your problems which are not too big for you to solve. Maybe it is a good thing that you are so cut off from the outside world.³¹

Despite the warning, the villagers conclude that contact with the world is inevitable.

Rumors fly that a road is planned to link the village to the outside world anyway, so they proceed with plans for the school.

As Father Vincent predicted, the tranquility of the village is shattered when the government sends in a schoolmaster to establish a school. He is able to exert authority through his position and superior training, which the villagers admire. As an educated man, a modern man, the schoolmaster rejects many of the traditional values the village holds dear, like their reliance on each other and their willingness to help their neighbors. He believes that it is up to the individual to get what he can out of life. Because of this attitude, the inhabitants perceive him as someone who is out to exploit them. They are proved correct when the schoolmaster gets rich through blackmail and other dishonest acts. When Father Vincent, who did not want the schoolmaster in the first place, tries to argue that he is just like any of the villagers who are striving to succeed, Benn, the local drunken philosopher, responds,

He is black, yes. But not my own people. Priest, he is closer to your people. I think he is your people. He learned in your schools, and he wears the clothes the way you wear them, and he talks the way you talk, and his

³¹Lovelace, *The Schoolmaster*, 32.

thinking is that of your people. He is yours, priest, He is not mine.³²

Eventually the schoolmaster goes too far. He rapes a young girl. She confesses to the priest but later kills herself. The novel ends when her father, who was instrumental in bringing the schoolmaster to the village, has him killed. All the problems that arise in the novel occur because the urban intruder does not respect the simple village inhabitant.

Like Selvon's, Lovelace's novel also dealt with modernization but this time modern life came to a rural village. Much of the rural population of the islands was illiterate. Like the villagers of Kumaca, many had no opportunities available to them to improve their lives. This village invited in the schoolmaster, but his outside influence destroyed their quiet, traditional existence.

British poet David Harsent said Lovelace "manages to avoid the tempting error of making the innocent too ingenuous and the knowledgeable too dastardly [and the novel reflects] the fatalism of the people themselves, their grave pessimism and their solemn yet colourful speech."³³ Kenneth Ramchand, West Indian literary critic and professor of literature at the University of the West Indies, praised the way Lovelace captured "the essence and colour of the region of North-East Trinidad where the real Kumaca and Valencia are to be found."³⁴

In 1962 Sylvia Wynter also studied rural life in her only novel, *The Hills of Hebron*.³⁵ Sylvia Wynter was born in Cuba in 1928 to Jamaican parents, who returned to Jamaica when she was two years old. She attended local schools until 1946 when she was awarded the Jamaica Centenary Scholarship for Girls, which allowed her to attend

³²Lovelace, *The Schoolmaster*, 66.

³³David Harsent, "School for Scandal," *Times Literary Supplement* (January 11, 1968): 29.

³⁴Kenneth Ramchand, "Introduction to *The Schoolmaster*," in Lovelace, *The Schoolmaster*, vi.

³⁵Sylvia Wynter, *The Hills of Hebron* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962).

King's College of the University of London. From there, she received a B.A. and an M.A. in modern languages. In London, she wrote for the BBC. In 1962 she returned to Jamaica where she worked to form a Jamaican theater company. In 1963 she took a job as assistant lecturer in Hispanic literature at the University of the West Indies. In 1974, she left to teach in the United States, eventually taking a job at Stanford University.³⁶

The Hills of Hebron is about the fate of a revivalist group, the New Believers of Hebron, after the death of their founder, Moses Barton. Barton died in a self-inflicted crucifixion.³⁷ The Church of the New Believers of Hebron, which he founded, is a small community living in isolation in a remote part of Jamaica.

For as far back as they could remember they had never been their own masters. Always behind them there had been a "boss" and behind the "boss" a government and behind the government, the white governor, and behind him, the King of England with the power of ships and guns and myths and distances of wide seas; and behind him, God. For a brief while Prophet Moses had changed the hierarchy, had led them up to Hebron; set himself above them, made them believe that behind him there was a God, black and made in their image and partial to them, his Chosen People. . . .but after his death, the hurricane had come just the same, and the drought.³⁸

The story begins, though, when Moses has been dead for years. The revivalists' new leader is Obadiah Brown. His leadership is threatened because he cannot intercede with God to end a prolonged drought that threatens to ruin the village and the church community that occupies it. Brown has vowed not to touch his wife Rosa for a year and a month until the next hurricane has passed, but Rosa is obviously pregnant. Miss Gatha,

³⁶Victor L. Chang, "Sylvia Wynter," in Dance, ed., *Fifty Caribbean Writers*, 498-500; Dance, *New World Adams*, 276-278. Wynter also wrote *Jamaica's National Heroes* (1971).

³⁷Wynter models him after the figure of Alexander Bedward (1859-1930), a Jamaican folk hero and leader of a messianic cult movement. He attracted thousands of followers at the beginning of the century. See Chang, "Sylvia Wynter," 504.

³⁸Wynter, *The Hills of Hebron*, 65.

the widow of the founder of the group who wants the leadership of the church for her son Isaac, denounces them both. Many in the community come to believe that the land is stricken with drought because Obadiah broke his vow. In fact, Rosa has been raped by Isaac, but the reader does not find this out until the end of the novel.

Isaac lost his faith in the New Believers when his mother sent him away to school as a boy to get an education. His new friends ridiculed the group. Wynter portrays this as part of the negative effect on black students of a colonial education. In order to fit in, Isaac must denounce his past. When he returned to the village, he saw the people through his friends' eyes.

He began to regard all the New Believers with a contemptuous indifference. He felt himself a giant among pygmies, an adult amongst children. On Sundays in the church it was all he could do to keep himself from laughing aloud at the stupidity of their belief . . . He knew that his father was a fool and God a lie.³⁹

Still, Isaac is bitter and disillusioned when he is not given leadership of the community after his father's death because he believes the position will earn him wealth and admiration. He returns to steal the money his mother has saved for his inheritance, because he believes that wealth will lead the people of the church to respect him. When Rosa catches him at the theft, he attacks her. Eventually the people find out the truth about Isaac's attack when he returns to try to steal more money; they trust in Obadiah again. At the end of the novel we learn that it was Isaac, bitter and disillusioned, who stole the first money box and raped Rosa.

In his attempt to provide leadership to the church members, Obadiah has realized that it is a mistake to isolate the church from society. He comes to the conclusion that it

³⁹Wynter, *The Hills of Hebron*, 225-226.

was his own pride that led to Rosa's rape; he should not have believed that abandoning his wife could bribe God into changing the course of village history. Obadiah becomes convinced that the village's self-imposed isolation has allowed the government to take the opportunity to abandon them, just as the British had.

Calm and smiling, would don the robes of office abandoned
by their former masters, would echo firmly their platitudes
and half-truths and compromises and subtle distortions,
would make themselves counterparts of the men whom
ostensibly they had overthrown.⁴⁰

Obadiah tells the people that the answer to their economic problems is to build a road to connect to the outside world and to sink wells to combat the problems of future droughts. He convinces the group that religious fervor is not enough to solve their problem of poverty, nor is isolation. Labor will free them from their poverty. Obadiah says, "The first thing we are going to do, starting tomorrow, is to build a good road, a broad road out into the world."⁴¹ At the end of the novel, Miss Gatha has reconciled with the Browns and the drought ends.

Wynter's novel, one of the few to deal with cultural issues directly, was about life in a rural, isolated village founded by a religious cult. In part she attacked the cult for believing that God would help them while they did nothing except pray to improve their circumstances. In part she criticized the government, which left them alone to fail, and the rest of the island that ridiculed the group, a fact we learned when Isaac left the village to get an education. Although the novel ended on a hopeful note, Wynter focused on the failure it portrayed when she wrote in 1968, "Their failure is important. The failure of

⁴⁰Wynter, *the Hills of Hebron*, 235.

⁴¹Wynter, *The Hills of Hebron*, 281. This message that West Indians could not rely on the government to help them is the same one that Earl Lovelace made in *While Gods Are Falling* and *The Schoolmaster*.

the men and women in West Indian novels is a witness to the impossible odds against which they are pitted.”⁴²

In an anonymous contemporary review of the novel one critic, referring to the problem of religious cults, said,

in this symbolic treatment of the dark forces of Jamaican nationalism [Wynter] has attacked the most difficult problem facing independent Jamaica.⁴³

Austin Clarke presents another perspective on rural society in *Among Thistles and Thorns* (1965), which is set in 1950s Barbados.⁴⁴ It is the story of nine-year-old Milton Sobers, a Barbadian schoolboy who is the son of a washerwoman. Milton runs away for a night and a day. He is trying to escape from school where he is consistently beaten by a semi-literate white schoolmaster who also steals the school’s ration of milk and biscuits to feed his own family. Milton is also trying to escape from his home life where his mother reduces his portion of food in order to feed Nathan, the latest man in her life. Milton longs for “new worlds and countries and happiness like Columbus; and perhaps, if the day was long enough I could even reach as far away from this village and from Nathan [his mother’s lover] and my mother, as Harlem New York, America.”⁴⁵ The story recounts his adventures as he hides out in the village during his sojourn. Milton is inspired to escape from his problems by running away from listening to the stories of his real father, Willy-Wily, who had migrated to the United States and brought back tales of Harlem. The boy believes Harlem is the answer to his abject poverty:

⁴²Sylvia Wynter, “We Must Learn to Sit Down Together and Talk About a Little Culture: Reflections on West Indian Writing and Criticism, Part I,” *Jamaica Journal* 2 (December 1968): 31.

⁴³“Loss of a Prophet,” *Times Literary Supplement* (September 28, 1962): 765.

⁴⁴Austin Clarke, *Among Thistles and Thorns* (London: Heinemann, 1965).

⁴⁵Clarke, *Among Thistles*, 179.

The street was crowded with people. All the people were black people. And the street was paved, and was wide, wide as the sea. And there were large motor-cars such as I had never seen in Barbados. And in the middle of the street was something like a large long flower bed with red flowers in it.⁴⁶

As he overhears conversations in the village, Milton realizes that many people, driven by poverty, emigrate; they too dream of a beautiful life overseas in a place like Harlem. In Milton's world he is surrounded by those same people who had not been able to escape.

Clarke uses Milton to provide a sarcastic look at colonial authority. The only white people in the novel are in positions of authority, for example, landowners and the teacher. For example, in a classroom scene the children are celebrating a state occasion and singing "Rule Britannia," as Milton thinks

The headmaster was soaked in glee. And I imagined all the glories of Britannia, our Motherland, Britannia so dear to us all and so free; Britannia who, or what or which, had brought us out of the ships crossing over from the terrible seas from Africa, and had placed us on this island, and had given us such good headmasters and assistant masters, and such a nice vicar to teach us how to pray to God – and he had come from England; and such nice white people who lived on the island with us, and who gave us jobs watering their gardens and taking out their garbage, most of which we found delicious enough to eat.⁴⁷

Milton also dreams of a world where a black man can control his own destiny. He proposes to a friend that Haile Selassie must be the wisest man in the world, a black man in charge of a country. His friend responds, "How could Selassie be the most wisest man in the world when Selassie is *only* a black man?"⁴⁸

⁴⁶Clarke, *Among Thistles*, 90.

⁴⁷Clarke, *Among Thistles*, 12.

⁴⁸Clarke, *Among Thistles*, 165.

Ruby, Milton's mother, and Nathan, her lover, are rearing Milton. This situation, of an unmarried couple with a child, portrayed in any number of novels, is presented, not discussed. It was a commonly-accepted living arrangement among the peasant class. Clarke describes Nathan as a typical West Indian man who has no real interest in family life. Ruby's prime concern about Milton is his education. As they are trying to decide whether or not to send Milton for more education at the high school, Nathan argues that a black man will never benefit from more education.

“He could even come out a saniterry inspector and walk all through this blasted village in a khaki suit and white cork hat with a white enamel ladle in his hand' to dip down inside the poor people shitty closets with. But be-Christ! After all them school fees I pay out and all them dollars spend on books, I hopes, I hopes to-hell that Milton do not come out as no damn inspector . . . that Ruby . . . that, Rube, is the lengths and advantages Milton could go in this kiss-me-arse island after he find himself in the possession of a high-school education.”⁴⁹

When he realizes that Ruby is committed to a better life for Milton, he appears to change his mind.

“And if Milton is a boy what have a singing voice in his head, I want him to sing in the cathedral choirs 'pon a Sunde. Oh Christ, I could see that bastard now, Rube, darling love! I could see Milton right this very now before my eye' wearing them red robes and that thing 'round his neck . . .”

“This is our son, Nathan.”

“Be-Christ, Ruby, you have just say a mouthful! Milton is our son. Our own-own flesh-and-blood possession!”⁵⁰

Eventually, however, Nathan convinces Ruby to end Nathan's education early so he can go to work and earn money to help support the family. He will live his life as a semi-literate laborer, just like Nathan. This portrays a typical attitude for a Barbadian peasant.

⁴⁹Clarke, *Among Thistles*, 105.

⁵⁰Clarke, *Among Thistles*, 105.

All the people who surround Milton assume this is how life works. His mother is concerned more with keeping Nathan in her life than with educating him. Although many residents dream of leaving, they realize that most will be tied to the village for the rest of their lives by poverty. There is no sense of outrage among the community.

Clarke did not deliberately isolate his village the way Lovelace and Wynter did; he did not have to do so because in the West Indies many rural villages isolated themselves by clinging to a traditional way of life that offered little hope for the future. Milton's father escaped for a short time but returned. Although he extolled the beauty of Harlem, he was not able to make a living there. Milton was a nine-year-old with dreams, but his mother was concerned more with keeping her male companion than with providing an opportunity for Milton. It was this type of attitude that West Indian politicians often struggled against in their attempts to bring positive change to the islands. Entrenched attitudes also made it difficult for the younger generation to escape to find a new life.

Literary critic W.S. Keir said "inevitably, there are very sad undertones of poverty, suffering and a kind of fated and fore-ordained sense of ultimate defeat [but] this book is also funny [and] bursting at the seams with vitality."⁵¹ Keir implied that although Clarke saw them as hopeless, the people themselves may not have held that attitude. Geta LeSeur, professor of African studies and English at the University of Arizona, argued that the novel depicts the despair of West Indians who see little hope of improving

⁵¹W.S. Keir, "From Islands in the Sun," *Times Literary Supplement* (July 18, 1965): 573.

their lives. Specifically, she said that “Clarke presents a harsh yet realistic look at boyhood when one is fatherless and penniless.”⁵²

City Streets, Barrack-Yards, and Urban Slums

West Indian novelists also wrote about the lives of poor urban residents whose lives had not improved with independence. In 1961 Ismith Khan wrote *The Jumbie Bird*, a study of East Indians in Trinidad.⁵³ Khan was born in 1925 in Port of Spain, Trinidad, of East Indian parents. His education included a B.A. in sociology from the New School for Social Research in New York and an M.A. in creative writing from Johns Hopkins University. Khan shared the view of most West Indian writers that he would not have become a writer had he stayed home. He believed he needed both a community of writers and an audience to inspire him.⁵⁴ His attitude reinforced the idea that as late as the early 1960s, there was almost no reading audience in the West Indies and no support for those who wanted a career as a writer.

Khan’s *The Jumbie Bird* is a novel that deals with the history of East Indians both as indentured servants and free immigrants. Most indentured servants came to Trinidad believing that they would be guaranteed a return passage to India when their indenture contract expired. They often came in family or village groups and strove to preserve their traditional way of life. When their indenture ended, though, the government failed to provide for their return trip. Very early in the novel Khan describes “old and decrepit Indians [who] . . . had left the sugar plantations long ago and come to the city.”⁵⁵ Many

⁵²Geta LeSeur, *Ten Is the Age of Darkness: The Black Bildungsroman* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 53.

⁵³Ismith Khan, *The Jumbie Bird* (London: Longman, [1961] 1974).

⁵⁴Arthur Drayton, “Ismith Khan,” in Dance, ed., *Fifty Caribbean Writers*, 246-248; Dance, *New World Adams*, 122-131.

⁵⁵Khan, *The Jumbie Bird*, 27.

still long to return to India but cannot afford the trip. A representative of the British government explains that “the past is dead and over, that India was no longer at odds with the British, and that India wished that they would settle [in Trinidad] and try to make this place their home.”⁵⁶

However, Khan presents East Indians who had a different experience as well. Kale Khan, a fictional character based on the author’s grandfather, was a free immigrant who came to Trinidad voluntarily. His family resisted British domination in colonial India and he continued to resist in Trinidad. Now that India is free, Khan sees an opportunity to finally free himself from colonial oppression. He wants to return to India because it is his home. In Trinidad he has taken on the role of leader of an unspecified group trying to appeal to the British government to help former East Indian indentured servants return home. Like them, Khan is not financially able to do so. His desire helps him to understand the plight of the indentured servant.

Khan’s son Rahim and his grandson Jamini view things differently from the older generation. Rahim, who is a member of the second generation, is weak, representing a time in transition; he says, “We ain’t belong to Hindustan, we ain’t belong to England, we ain’t belong to Trinidad.”⁵⁷ Toward the end of the novel, he becomes more accepting of his history, which allows him to free himself from tradition. He begins to think about becoming involved in business or politics. He wants to be accepted as a successful East Indian who chose to stay in Trinidad. Rahim is inspired in part by a group that the author presents as a secondary story, successful professionals and businessmen. They are second generation East Indians who have accepted their lives in Trinidad and are critical

⁵⁶Khan, *The Jumbie Bird*, 169.

⁵⁷Khan, *The Jumbie Bird*, 68.

of those, like Khan, who want to go home to India. For instance, Samuel Salwan, a lawyer who looks down upon his East Indian countrymen, claims that most of them have abandoned traditional life but know how to “turn Indian overnight” when the situation warrants it. Salwan represents an East Indian professional who took control of his life and made it a success. He is what Rahim hopes to be.⁵⁸

Jamini, typifying the third generation, is an integral part of the new society, but falls under the spell of his grandfather and his desires to return to India. When his grandfather dies, Jamini is able to accept the life in Trinidad that he prefers. He realizes that India is alien to him; he is Trinidadian and that is all he knows. His father, who has started his own transformation, tells him,

A man have to find work in this world, he have to do something that great – I don’t mean big – I mean something that only he could give to the world. . . . because if a man can’t find that something then he life finish!⁵⁹

Khan showed how the legacy of colonialism shaped their lives, no matter what path they took. Kale Khan had fled the inequality of British colonialism in India, only to face it again in Trinidad. The author showed how the indentured servants strove to keep their cultural traditions, but once they were free they had to give them up to become part of the new society, as Rahim found. Khan claimed that he was not trying to develop a political theme, but he did hope that West Indian society would see itself in his novels and try to cope with its problems. He particularly argued that the novel represented a problem specific to the Caribbean – the search for a sense of identity for East Indians on a former colonial island that was now run by a new black local government. According to the author,

⁵⁸Khan, *The Jumbie Bird*, 185.

⁵⁹Khan, *The Jumbie Bird*, 223.

we are all of us [West Indians] always coming up with some sort of voyage. [West Indian poet] Eddie Brathwaite has told me about his journey to Africa. [West Indian novelist] Vidiya Naipaul has been to India . . . Now what are these people doing in all these places they have gone to. They didn't just to go make a fortune, I think, but they are still looking for themselves, or looking for some ancestry.⁶⁰

Khan's novel about East Indians differed from earlier ones only in its perspective because it was written from the point of view of one who was not a former indentured servant still attached to the land. Still, Kale Khan suffered the same sense of loss as his fellow countrymen who came in search of work. His migration to Trinidad left him as a colonial subject, just as he had been at home. He battled the British by taking on the cause of East Indian indentured servants who had been promised a return trip at the end of their service which the British had failed to provide. Khan died before he could find his way home. His son and grandson found it difficult to break away from the traditional way of thinking in which they were raised. Rahim, the son, was finally inspired by East Indians who had moved outside traditional East Indian society. Jamini, who was at home in the only society he had ever known, had to wait until his grandfather died to truly accept Trinidad as his home.

Khan's novel received little critical attention. In the only contemporary review of the novel, A. Rhodes called it "an interesting study of migration problems."⁶¹

In *The Obeah Man* (1964) Khan is concerned with the colonial experience in Trinidad as well.⁶² The primary characters represent Trinidad's ethnic variety. Zampi the Obeah Man is "the end of masses of assimilations and mixtures, having the eyes of

⁶⁰Dance, *New World Adams*, 125-131.

⁶¹A. Rhodes, "Review of *The Jumbie Bird*," *Times Literary Supplement* (September 22, 1961): 633.

⁶²Ismith Khan, *The Obeah Man* (London: Hutchinson, 1964). See n. 17 above for an explanation of obeah.

the East Indian people, the build of the Negro, the skin of the Chinese, and some of the colour of all.”⁶³ Another character, Massahood, has a chocolate-brown face that “bore the same question mark of lost races and cultures.”⁶⁴ As for Zolda, the woman over whom they compete, “all the races that had lingered in these islands blossomed in her face.”⁶⁵ Khan portrays the colonial condition as a sense of emptiness and a general lack of direction. Zampi says,

It ain't have no place for we. The islands drowning and we going down with them – down, down, down. One day the clocks in the big church and them go stop and nobody here to fix them or wind them up . . . We is nobody, and we ain't have nowhere to go. Everything leave me cold, cold feeling in my insides, and I ain't have no uses for you or nobody nor nothing – nothing . . .⁶⁶

In the novel, Khan uses the Trinidadian Carnival to convey the sense of a meaningless colonial life that is all about fun and never about achievement. Zolda and Massahood are part of the mass of rum-drinking, night-clubbing escapists.

Zampi wants to change his life. He renounces his former hedonistic life style and tries to make his new life wholesome by giving up rum and nightlife. He helps others do the same. He even persuades Zolda to leave the degenerate city and move with him to the hills. As Obeah man he becomes a diviner, spiritual guide, physical healer, and magical transformer. To Zampi, obeah is real, as it is to many people of African descent on the islands.

Khan's novel was the first serious treatment of obeah that offered it as positive option to change meaningless lives. Other authors have included references to or

⁶³Khan, *The Obeah Man*, 11.

⁶⁴Khan, *The Obeah Man*, 32.

⁶⁵Khan, *The Obeah Man*, 164.

⁶⁶Khan, *The Obeah Man*, 66-67.

episodes involving the practice, but most portrayed it as a lower-class symbol of desperation, an African-based belief the poor could use to challenge British authority. Khan described the use of obeah in the novel as symbolic, having “to do with a society or a culture where a young person growing up finds himself in a situation where he is looking for some sort of meaning in life, if not, you know, some sort of job.”⁶⁷

In a contemporary review, literary critic W.S. Keir said, “Mr. Khan’s style throbs with energy and the whole novel is both very sensitive and very raw.”⁶⁸ In a later review Kenneth Ramchand says,

The end of the novel is confused. Zolda’s decision to return to the hills with Zampi in pursuit of higher life strikes the reader as too arbitrarily contrived.⁶⁹

Lovelace also tackled the subject of the search for a meaningful life in Trinidad from the perspective of a rural peasant who decided to move to the city. In *While Gods Are Falling* (1965), Walter Castle searches for himself in the Port of Spain slum where he lives.⁷⁰ Lovelace describes the place as “dark, poisonous and stinking, something like a sore in this city.”⁷¹ Castle moves his wife and children to the city after his rural life falls apart as a result of disputes with other members of his family. His whole social network had collapsed. When we meet him, he is no longer able to support his wife and children adequately. Tess, his wife, does not believe they have any kind of future in the slums. In these city slums he lives with other poor and frustrated individuals, but there is no sense of community in the neighborhood.

⁶⁷Dance, ed., *New World Adams*, 132.

⁶⁸W.S. Keir, “Raw Caribbean,” *Times Literary Supplement* (October 15, 1964): 933.

⁶⁹Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and Its Background* (London: Heinemann, 1983), 127.

⁷⁰Earl Lovelace, *While Gods Are Falling* (London: Longman, [1965] 1984).

⁷¹Lovelace, *While Gods Are Falling*, 9.

Lovelace details the many problems that afflict the urban poor and make it difficult for them to succeed without the traditional community support they were accustomed to in their rural communities. For example, Castle believes that his peasant background thwarts any chance of promotion. He is further discouraged because he lives in a noisy tenement where fights most often end in murder. He begins to think that he cannot stay in the city any longer. He is tired of preachers and politicians who promise utopia but cannot deliver it.

Walter's life begins to change when he is given an opportunity to help a neighbor and he takes it. His neighbor's son is arrested. The police charge him with a violent attack, without any proof that he did it. The boy's mother immediately acts to help her son. Her action makes Castle realize that he must work to improve life for himself. He sees that neither gods nor government can make things better. He learns that he has to try to help himself and others or he too will be guilty of the indifference that creates poverty, failure, and violence. In the end, though, the urban community comes together at Castle's urging to assume responsibility for each other and for the young people in their midst. They get involved in saving the boy who was arrested and teaching the other children not to accept the life they now live. His success once again gives Castle a purpose in life.

Lovelace himself commented on his protagonist, saying, "I think what we're talking about is a man in a community, a man's view of his integrity, and this is defined not by him alone, but by the community in which he lives."⁷² Lovelace was trying to show that adjusting to the changing world he lived in was in part the responsibility of the individual. Yet he could not change his life on his own. He needed help from the

⁷²Dance, ed., *New World Adams*, 149.

community. Much as Sylvia Wynter made the point that people in need could not rely on God or government, Lovelace too argued that the community must work together to demand change.

Marigold Johnson, a British reviewer, claimed that “Mr. Lovelace is a little heavy-handed in his zeal to get at the roots of social discontent, but his young couple and the world they must hate enough to improve are deeply observed and excitingly alive.”⁷³ In his 1969 review of another Lovelace book, Edward Brathwaite also commented on *While Gods Are Falling*. He observes that the author described a search for identity and at the same time painted a picture of life in Trinidad.⁷⁴

In *The Dragon Can't Dance* (1979), Lovelace once again deals with the problems of rural inhabitants who move to the city.⁷⁵ Most of the inhabitants of Calvary Hill, a Port of Spain barrack-yard, have left their rural communities to find a new identity in the city. Lovelace describes Calvary Hill:

Where the sun set on starvation and rise on potholed roads,
thrones for stray dogs that you could play banjo on their rib
bones, holding garbage piled high like cathedral spire,
sparkling with flies buzzing like torpedoes.⁷⁶

The characters use different methods to assert their individualism – violence, music, rebellion, masquerade, and the attainment of material possessions. Aldrick Prospect plays the dragon each year at Carnival, threatening and terrorizing the crowd. Aldrick's father had brought him to the city and taught him that he had to stand on his own, but not how to accomplish that. Aldrick,

⁷³M. Johnson, “Men Only,” *Times Literary Supplement* (June 10, 1965): 469.

⁷⁴Edward Brathwaite, “Review of *the Schoolmaster*,” *BIM* 12 (January-June, 1969): 273.

⁷⁵Earl Lovelace, *The Dragon Can't Dance* (London: Longman, [1979] 1981).

⁷⁶Lovelace, *The Dragon Can't Dance*, 23.

not knowing where his next meal was coming from, would get up at midday from sleep, yawn, stretch, then start to think of where he might get something to eat, his brain working in the same smooth unhurried nonchalance with which he moved his feet, a slow cruising crawl which he quickened only at Carnival.⁷⁷

It is only through his role as a dragon that he asserts his presence; otherwise he goes through life as an anonymous inhabitant of the yard, unseen by most urban residents.

Sylvia is the love of Aldrick's life.

To him she was the most dangerous female person on the Hill, for she possessed, he suspected, the ability not only to capture him in passion but to enslave him in caring, to bring into his world those ideas of love and home and children that he had spent his whole life avoiding.⁷⁸

When Aldrick refuses to get involved with her, she finds another man. Even though she would prefer to be with Aldrick, to survive in the yard she must find some man to support her.

Pariag is a young East Indian man who yearns for acceptance and recognition from the inhabitants of the yard, from whom he is separated by class, race, and ethnic culture. He and his wife, Dolly, are the only two people of East Indian descent in the yard. The reason he

had come to the city to live was so that he could join up with people, be part of something bigger than just New Lands sugar estate, be more than just a little country Indian, cutting sugar-cane in the day, cutting grass for the cattle in the evening, and on Sundays, playing . . . he longed to go beyond the cows and grass and cane, out beyond the droning chant of pundit, into a world where people could see him, and he could be somebody in their eyes.⁷⁹

⁷⁷Lovelace, *The Dragon Can't Dance*, 25.

⁷⁸Lovelace, *The Dragon Can't Dance*, 45.

⁷⁹Lovelace, *The Dragon Can't Dance*, 91-92.

Pariag gets a new bike to show the others what he can accomplish, but they see it as a threat to acquire more than others. When his neighbors destroy the bike, he confronts them. Standing up for his rights earns him the respect he wants in the yard.

In the urban setting they all find different values, like wealth, material possessions, and political clout, which are becoming important but are still alien to the rural newcomers. Aldrick says to his friend Philo, the Calypso musician, “All we thinking about is to show this city, this island, this world, that we is people, not because we own anything, not because we have things, but because we is. We are because we is.”⁸⁰ In order to feel any sense of importance they must assert their “right to a humanness unlinked to the possessions of any goods or property, arrived at, realized, born to, in consequence of their being.”⁸¹

The characters who seek their identity through temporary involvements, like Carnival, come to recognize that it is an empty, unfulfilling effort. Aldrick says it best:

We was saying to them the residents of the city] “Look at us! We is people!” We wasn’t ready to take over nothing for we own self. We put the responsibility on them to act to do something. . . . We is people. I, you, you, for we own self. . . . We have to act for we.⁸²

When they acknowledge their obligations to others and join together into a caring community, they begin to feel whole. Aldrick and a few others who are dissatisfied with their lives launch the People’s Liberation Army, but they have no one to liberate except themselves. They stage a Black Power uprising, reminiscent of an actual event in Trinidad in 1970. The police arrest them all and they go to prison. Aldrick spends five years in jail, where he comes to understand his life. He realizes that he must work to

⁸⁰Lovelace, *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, 111.

⁸¹Lovelace, *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, 151.

⁸²Lovelace, *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, 188-189.

achieve change before he can expect help from others. He must take responsibility for his own life and the lives of those around him. He moves from his previously self-centered position to admit his feelings for Sylvia; “He wanted to give her life, her self. . . . He had to learn how to live and how to give life.”⁸³ When he gets out of jail he declares his love for her and she abandons her lover for him. Aldrick announces, “Now I know I ain’t a dragon . . . Funny, eh? Years. And now I know I is more than just to play a masquerade once a year for two days, to live for two days.”⁸⁴

In this novel Lovelace argued that if government and society were going to continue to ignore yard residents, they would have to act in a positive way to change their own lives and call attention to their own needs. The Black Power riots were just one example of a futile revolt against entrenched power. Just like other authors of this period, he emphasized individual initiative with community support to accomplish positive change for the people of the yard.

Reviewer Lendia Lewis described Lovelace’s book as portraying a working-class struggle for survival. She said,

The people whose lives are revealed in this novel fight to secure their humanity from the abyss of poverty. In the yard, many are unable to sell their labor power while others have long since given up on the idea of work in its formal sense.⁸⁵

In 1964 Orlando Patterson wrote *The Children of Sisyphus*, which deals with people who live in conditions worse than those experienced by barrack-yard residents.⁸⁶

The novel is about a group of Jamaicans where extreme poverty forces them to live on

⁸³Lovelace, *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, 127.

⁸⁴Lovelace, *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, 212.

⁸⁵Lendia Lewis, “Masculinity and the Dance of the Dragon: Reading Lovelace Discursively,” *Feminist Review* 59 (Summer 1998): 165.

⁸⁶Orlando Patterson, *The Children of Sisyphus* (London: Hutchinson, 1964).

the Dungle, derelict land near the West Kingston foreshore that is used for dumping garbage. The residents are among the poorest members of society who live violent lives where they fight over almost everything, particularly anything that will help them survive. As Sammy the garbageman drives his cart through the Dungle, he describes what he sees as shacks and huts for the people who live there. Ultimately, however, the novel is about hope. The people of the Dungle believe they have a better future; they just do not know how to accomplish it.

Dinah is the central character of the book. She works as a prostitute, struggling to escape the Dungle by targeting powerful men, like a constable and a revivalist leader. Dinah lives such a bleak existence that she has never eaten an egg in her life, according to Patterson. Her life style is reminiscent of women living in barrack-yards who believe that their only hope of survival and escape is the financial support of a man. Shephard, whom Patterson describes as a Christian revivalist, whips Dinah to exorcise her evil spirits even as he takes advantage of her as a prostitute.

Brother Solomon, leader of the Rastafarians, also plays a prominent role in the novel. The Rastafarians have gathered on the Dungle because they believe a ship is coming to take them to Ethiopia, their promised land in Africa. In fact, Brother Solomon has known for a long time that the ship would not come, but he chose not to tell his followers because he wanted to give them hope for the future; “For a moment they are conquerors. For a moment they have cheated the dreary circle. And it’s only the moment that counts.”⁸⁷ Yet the actions of individual Rastafarians belie this sense of hope. One of them, Cyrus, rapes Dinah. He rationalizes his action by saying that he is saving her from a worse life and educating her about his religion. When she leaves him, he plots to beat

⁸⁷Patterson, *The Children of Sisyphus*, 202.

and kill her. Cyrus is still living in that dreary circle that Brother Solomon is trying to end.

A minor character, Mary, is a mother with a light-skinned daughter; Mary struggles to find a way for her daughter to escape the Dungle through a high school education. She gets no cooperation from other residents, though. They are all concerned with their own problems; every one of them would use Mary or her daughter if that would improve their own life.

Although Patterson portrayed the Rastafarians as sensitive and cooperative, embracing mutual support and fellowship, Cyrus contradicted that depiction. In the failure of Solomon to deliver the group to Africa, Patterson showed the futility of faith in the peoples' search to reintegrate into mainstream society. Slum clearance, welfare workers, politicians, and priests are all irrelevant to the struggle if the individual members of the group are not committed to change. Patterson's message was much like that of Lovelace. Both presented the poorest members of society, who after years of living on independent islands, still struggled to eke out a living. They argued that these people had to begin to take control of their own future. Mary, who was determined to make a better life for her daughter, exemplified that attitude.

The Children of Sisyphus received a good deal of attention in 1964 when it was published. Among those dealing with the socio-historical value of the novel was an anonymous review in the *Times Literary Supplement*, which praised its documentary value, saying it was "worth a dozen field surveys."⁸⁸ George Robert Coulthard, a British

⁸⁸*Times Literary Supplement* (April 2, 1964): 269.

literary critic, called the language foul and obscene, but true, and urged readers to check the accuracy of Patterson's work in the bars of Spanish Town Road.⁸⁹

Conclusion

These novelists did not display the blatant anti-colonialism that was apparent in the novels of the first generation of West Indian writers. Instead they focused attention on four problems that they believed were evident in West Indian society. First, they acknowledged the fact that many of the same problems existed on the islands that plagued them before independence. Second, the novels contained some subtle criticism of the new local ruling elite. Third, there was much more criticism of empty movements or groups that could not deliver forward-moving change, like the Black Power movement and the Rastafarians. Finally, the novelists laid the blame for the inability of the lower classes to achieve success on their own lack of action.

The authors highlighted in this chapter dealt with problems that had been of concern on the islands for years. Economic control of rural estates was still in the hands of white owners. The peasant population remained dependent on the estates for financial security. Even those who owned some land of their own relied on the village estate to supplement their income. This social relationship began with Emancipation when the former slaves refused to work for their former masters; they did what they could to eke out an independent living. Because economic control remained in the hands of white owners, former slaves and their descendants continued to try to survive without depending on estate owners.

⁸⁹George Robert Coulthard, "Review of *The Children of Sisyphus*," *Caribbean Quarterly* 10 (March 1964): 70.

The racial tension between blacks and East Indians also emerged in the immediate post-Emancipation era when East Indians arrived to work as indentured servants on the plantations. The free black population viewed the East Indians as slaves and thus inferior to their free state. Tensions between the two groups had never ended. In fact, as we saw in Chapter 7, racial problems increased when East Indians began to fear for their position under black-dominated governments.

The fact that urban barrack-yard and slum residents continued to live almost outside of the general population was also a problem with which the island governments had failed to deal. Job creation could not keep up with population growth on the islands.⁹⁰ Efforts to clean up urban slum areas often just caused residents to move somewhere else. In an interview in 1979, Orlando Patterson talked about Jamaica's efforts to clean up Kingston by bulldozing the Dungle and replacing it with a housing project. Patterson said,

very rarely are the people who receive new units the people who are displaced. Usually the people who were displaced can't afford the down payment or instalment, even though it may be very small; and even when they can afford it there's usually lot of political patronage in who gets it, so usually they're outsiders who come in. So, all these people – they moved to form other slums.⁹¹

Patterson's quote leads directly to the second issue these writers introduce – criticism of the new locally elected, primarily black, governments. These novels did not lay blame on the new governments to the same extent that the earlier writers had blamed British colonialism for the problems of West Indian society. The critiques found in this later works are more subtle. Wynter, for instance, had Obidiah reach the conclusion that

⁹⁰See Chapter 7 for details.

⁹¹Dance, ed., *New World Adams*, 198.

the New Believers' self-imposed isolation gave the government an opportunity to ignore their needs. In *The Children of Sisyphus*, among the people Patterson showed exploiting Dinah were police constables. Of course, just by relating the fact that the old societal problems still exist, the novelists were criticizing the failure of governments to respond to the needs of the majority of the population.

A third theme of the novels was the inability of religious and issue-oriented movements to solve the problems of society. The Black Power movement received some criticism, for instance by Lovelace, whose character Aldrick was arrested after a failed Black Power uprising. Religious movements got much more criticism by authors writing about both rural and urban problems. Several, especially Wynter and Patterson, made the point that religion had not been able to solve the problems of society.

Finally, in a new departure from previous authors, these writers proposed that the solution to all these societal problems lay in the ability of the lower-class West Indians to take charge of their own lives and futures – to work together to achieve change. In particular, these writers used urban slum life to send more of a message than C.L.R. James intended in *Minty Alley*, or Mais in *The Hills Were Joyful Together*. In James's book, he simply described life in the barrack-yard in an effort to call attention to a group of people who were ignored by urban society. Mais put more emphasis on the harsh reality of life in the yard and also portrayed the inhabitants as not participating in the political and economic changes taking place on the island, thereby encouraging governments to focus on the needs of these people. The novelists of the 1960s and 70s argued that neither religious groups nor governments had come to the aid of the poorest

people on the island. They believed it was up to the people, after all these years, to strive for change on their own.

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION

This study set out to show the interaction between literature and politics in the British West Indies from 1950 to 1980. The thesis was threefold. First, that the designation West Indian became common when the former colonial subjects of the British in the Caribbean found it necessary to define themselves as a united group while at the same time distancing themselves from their colonial past. Second, the novelists who set about the task of searching for a different identity did have an impact on shaping the culture of the region. Third, even though West Indian writers did not intend their novels to be used to provide a history of the British Caribbean, they presented a realistic view of West Indian society between 1950 and 1980. As a result, their novels can be used in conjunction with historical works to gain a comprehensive view of the islands.

West Indian Identity

The search for a West Indian identity had two contexts – political and literary. The British described their islands in the Caribbean as the West Indies. In 1947 island political leaders, led by Norman Manley and Grantley Adams working with the British, began the process of structuring a political system to unite the islands under a federal government – the West Indies Federation. The Federation formally came into being in 1958 but ended in 1962 when Jamaica withdrew.

From a literary perspective George Lamming and Sam Selvon were the first novelists to adopt the label West Indian to describe émigrés from the islands in England. When Lamming and Selvon sailed for England in 1950 the basic outlines of the political Federation were already in place. They recognized the similarities of men from various islands and so adopted the label West Indian to emphasize what they shared in common. The islanders who encountered racial prejudice in England used their common heritage to forge bonds of friendship in what to seemed to be a hostile society. Lamming and Selvon introduced the cultural aspects of West Indianness to the world in their novels about the experiences of these islanders in England.

In addition, the term West Indian was applied to the literature produced by writers from the British Caribbean islands by literary critics, beginning in 1979 with the publication of Bruce King's *West Indian Literature*.¹ Critics like King and Kenneth Ramchand recognized the tremendous output of novels by West Indian writers, beginning with Vic Reid's *New Day* in 1949.² One common thread of the novels was that they focused attention on a part of the world largely ignored by historians and writers except in terms of the British political and cultural role in the region. King and Ramchand, as well as later critics, defined West Indian literature as that produced by novelists who came from one of the islands and wrote about the region. The parameters they set allowed them to include novelists like East Indian V.S. Naipaul who never acknowledged a West Indian inheritance. In fact, Naipaul believed that coming from a colonial society left him without cultural roots. He spent his life writing about the negative aspects of West Indian colonial life as he experienced them in Trinidad.

¹Bruce King, ed., *West Indian Literature* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1979).

²Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and Its Background* (London: Heinemann, 1983); Vic Reid, *New Day* (Chatham, NJ: The Chatham Bookseller, [1949] 1972).

By the late 1970s what critics still referred to as West Indian literature had evolved. From general critiques of conditions in the West Indies that were often aimed at specific islands, but could have described any one of them, novelists began to highlight conditions on specific islands.³ The major reason for the shift in emphasis derived from political developments – when Jamaica and Trinidad gained their independence in 1962 and Barbados followed in 1966, the independence governments developed differently. For example, in Jamaica, the Michael Manley government poured money into social programs that did not solve the economic problems of most islanders but did create new financial problems for the government. In Trinidad, Eric Williams had to confront the concerns of a significant East Indian minority worried about its position in society under a black government. Novelists increasingly focused on the problems of their specific island.

By 1990 a new generation of literary critics recognized that the problems these islands faced were similar to those of other Caribbean islands with French, Spanish, or Dutch colonial histories. In 2003, Rex Nettleford published *Caribbean Cultural Identity: The Case of Jamaica*.⁴ This collection of essays focused on cultural developments in Jamaica and its place within the wider Caribbean and Latin America. In one chapter Nettleford explores cultural integration and cooperation in the wider Caribbean. He concludes that there are similarities and differences among the islands but cultural cooperation has begun, particularly between Jamaica and Cuba. In 2004, Sandra Courtman edited a study called *Beyond the Blood, the Beach and the Banana: New*

³For example, Austin Clarke wrote about his experience working for the government of Barbados in *The Prime Minister* and Orlando Patterson wrote about the inhabitants of the Dungle, which actually existed in Kingston, Jamaica, in *The Children of Sisyphus*.

⁴Rex M. Nettleford, *Caribbean Cultural Identity: The Case of Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle, 2003).

Perspectives in Caribbean Studies.⁵ Most of the essays in this collection dealt with the British experience in terms of history, migration, tourism, government and politics, and culture and literature. However, the book also included an essay on Haitian migrants to the Turks and Caicos Islands, a study of tourism in Cuba, an analysis of government and politics in the Dutch islands of the Caribbean, and a critique of the novel about the French colonial experience in Trinidad. Emily Wroe writes about Lawrence Scott's novel, *Aelred's Sin*, which explores racial and cultural differences as well as the themes of sexuality and spirituality. The new studies accepted certain broad generalizations. First, critics agreed that all of the islands of the Caribbean had economic problems that stemmed from their years as colonial outposts. These economic problems were exacerbated by their small size. The islands also had to deal with the fact that as they tried to distance themselves from their colonial rulers they remained tied to them by language. Therefore, this new generation of critics began to argue in favor of a Caribbean perspective to the region rather than West Indian.

Shaping the Culture of the Region

At the beginning of the twentieth century there was no West Indian or local island culture except that imposed by the British. Island students studied British history and literature in school. No matter what level of education he received, no black, colored, or East Indian island native ever rose to a level of authority in the islands. Only mixed-race, light-skinned, Creole natives could hope to reach any significant level of service in the British-controlled government. Books about the West Indian islands were written by

⁵Sandra Courtman, ed., *Beyond the Blood, the Beach and the Banana: New Perspectives in Caribbean Studies* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2004). Note that both Nettleford's and Courtman's books were published in Jamaica. By 2000, more publishers were opening offices in the Caribbean.

British residents about their lives and concerns, and by British travelers who recounted their impressions of the region.

The first efforts to create a regional literature came in the 1930s following the development of labor organizations that demanded increased political influence. *The Beacon* in Trinidad and *Focus* in Jamaica were literary magazines that provided writers with an outlet for their work. Only a small segment of society, those who could afford the magazines and had the time to read them, supported these efforts but some of the contributors used this local platform to launch literary careers overseas – Ralph Mendes in the United States and C.L.R. James in Britain. West Indian literature would build upon these beginnings.

The novelists writing from the 1950s to the 1980s continued to reach only a small minority on the islands but their impact was important. Although only elites read the novels, elites were, as Benedict Anderson has argued, important in shaping identity and creating a sense of community. Elites were educated, literate members of society.

According to Anderson,

It is generally recognized that the intelligentsias were central to the rise of nationalism in the colonial territories, not least because colonialism ensured that native agrarian magnates, big merchants, industrial entrepreneurs, and even a large professional class were relative rarities. Almost everywhere economic power was either monopolized by the colonialists themselves, or unevenly shared with a politically impotent class of pariah (non-native) businessmen . . . [Literacy] meant access . . . to modern . . . culture in the broadest sense, and in particular, to the models of nationalism, nation-ness, and nation-state.⁶

⁶Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, [1983] 1991), 116.

The new political and economic elite in West Indian society knew and interacted with many of the writers. Vic Reid held a number of government positions in Jamaica; he served as chairman of the Jamaica National Trust Commission and a trustee of the Historical Foundation Research Centre. Roger Mais was an active member of Norman Manley's People's National Party. Austin Clarke was Cultural Officer and Advisor to Prime Minister Tom Adams of Barbados from 1975-76.

West Indian novelists also brought the region to the attention of the world. Their novels were published in Britain and the United States. Their work was broadcast over the BBC's Caribbean Voices radio program. Lamming received a Guggenheim grant in 1955; Selvon received two, one in 1955 and another in 1968. They both served as writers-in-residence at the University of the West Indies. Lamming, Selvon, Naipaul, Clarke, and Earl Lovelace worked as visiting scholars at universities in the United States. Orlando Patterson taught at the University of the West Indies and at Harvard. Ismith Khan and Sylvia Wynter taught in the United States at several different universities. Most of the original novels were published in Britain, but later versions were issued by American publishers. The work of most of these writers was reviewed in British and American publications, like the *Times Literary Supplement*, and the *New York Times*.

West Indian Novels and History

Prior to the advent of West Indian literature the island received attention only from British writers. Historically, the West Indies were included in British history. British residents wrote about their lives and problems. British visitors described their impressions of the islands. Local residents who attended school learned British history

and read British literature. Even educated natives did not see their own islands as providing topics of interest.

West Indian writers in the 1950s and beyond took a different perspective. They were raised on the islands during a time when local union leaders fought for political rights. They lived on islands that were in the process of establishing the West Indian Federation. Later writers, in the 1960s and 70s, lived on islands that were independent for the first time. The novels these authors wrote described life as they knew it. They wrote from the perspective of the masses.

They did not claim that their novels were historically accurate. Vic Reid in his introduction to *New Day* acknowledged that he did not intend his novel to be historically accurate. Instead, he wrote it to show West Indians that it was their efforts that resulted in the Constitution of 1944. These authors intended to describe a way of life that was familiar to them. Lamming wrote from the perspective of his own experience about life in a Barbados village during the riots of 1938. Selvon and Naipaul wrote many of their novels about East Indians and their lives in Trinidad. Some writers explained how political and economic changes impacted individuals and villages, as Clarke did in *Survivors of the Crossing*. Lamming described how island life had shaped social relationships in his novel *In the Castle of My Skin*. They provided insight into personal relationships among individuals – in barrack-yards, in rural villages, in private homes – and in the process they described living spaces that were unfamiliar to British and American readers, as Mais did in *The Hills Were Joyful Together*. Some writers introduced popular culture on the islands – especially the use of steel bands and the calypso song as protest music as portrayed by Lamming in *Of Age and Innocence*.

West Indian literature introduced new ideas about life in the British Caribbean to readers in Britain, the United States, and around the world who had never given much thought to the area. Thus, their novels helped both to shape local culture and identity and outsiders to understand the British West Indies in the late twentieth century.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

AREA AND POPULATION¹

	Total Area (sq. miles)	Total Population (estimated thousands)
Barbados	166	192,800
Jamaica	4,677	1,249,900
Leeward Islands		
Antigua	171	41,800
Montserrat	32	14,300
St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla	153	46,200
Trinidad and Tobago	1,980	558,000
Windward Islands		
Dominica	305	47,600
Grenada	133	72,400
St. Lucia	238	70,100
St. Vincent	150	61,600

¹These population figures were taken from the last census prior to the first meeting to discuss federation, 1943 in Jamaica and 1946 in all the other islands. See Great Britain, Colonial, *The West Indies: The Making of a Nation* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1958), 49.

APPENDIX B

DISTRIBUTION BY RACIAL ORIGIN
(IN THOUSANDS)¹

	AFRICAN	EAST INDIAN	EUROPEAN	MIXED	OTHERS
Barbados	148.9	0.1	9.8	33.8	0.1
Jamaica	971.4	21.4	16.0	232.2	8.8
Leewards					
Antigua	35.4		0.7	5.4	0.2
Montserrat	13.3		0.1	0.9	
St. Kitts- Nevis- Anguilla	40.0	0.1	0.9	5.1	0.1
Trinidad & Tobago	261.5	195.7	15.3	78.8	6.7
Windwards					
Dominica	11.9		0.1	35.5	0.1
Grenada	53.3	3.5	0.6	14.8	0.2
St. Lucia	40.6	2.6	0.3	26.3	0.2
St. Vincent	45.0	1.8	1.9	12.6	0.3

¹Great Britain, Colonial Office, *The West Indies: The Making of a Nation* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1958), 49.

Sharon Catherine Sewell

Candidate for the Degree of

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Dissertation: CULTURE AND DECOLONIZATION IN THE BRITISH WEST
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Education: Graduated from Bishop Cassidy High School, Taunton, Massachusetts; received Bachelor of Arts degree in History from Bridgewater State College, Bridgewater, Massachusetts in May 1978; received a Master of Arts degree in History from Oklahoma State University in July 1997. Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree with a major in History at Oklahoma State University in December 2007.

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Title of Study: CULTURE AND DECOLONIZATION IN THE BRITISH WEST
INDIES: LITERATURE AND POLITICS, 1930-1980

Pages in Study: 359

Certificate for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major Field: History

Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this study was threefold: first, to investigate the use of the label West Indian to describe the former colonial subjects of the British in the Caribbean after World War II; second, to determine whether West Indian novelists, who began writing in 1949, had an impact in shaping the culture of the West Indies before and after independence; and third, to examine whether the novels they wrote used social realism to describe West Indian society between 1950 and 1980 and thus can be used to supplement the historical portrait of the islands. The method used included a historical and literary examination of the political, economic, social, and cultural developments on the islands.

Findings and Conclusions: The study determined that British colonial subjects from the islands of the West Indies adopted the term to describe themselves when they began to interact after World War II particularly among islanders who traveled to Britain and found that no matter which island they came from, they shared certain characteristics, which drew them together in what was often a hostile environment in Britain. The study also found that West Indian novelists had an impact in shaping the culture of the region. Although only the elites on the islands read their novels, as Benedict Anderson has argued, elites were important in shaping identity and creating a sense of community. Many novelists also contributed to local culture as members of or consultants to the new governments that emerged on the islands after independence. Most importantly, the study found that these novels presented a realistic view of West Indian society between 1950 and 1980 that can be used to supplement the historical record of the period. The novelists described life as they knew it; they wrote from the perspective of the masses.

Advisor's Approval: Dr. Elizabeth Williams